FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART

ImagineFX

FILM ART!

SUCKER PUNCH
BREATHTAKING CONCEPT ART FROM JOEL CHANG

Turn to page 44 for an exclusive chat with the film's concept artist!

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DYNAMIC ART
Ignite your character designs with killer art advice from **Dan LuVisi**

Inside

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LEARN DIGITAL OIL TRICKS IN PAINTER
CREATE A FANTASY SHIP FROM PHOTOS

Interview

SYD MEAD
"They are grey, bombastic philistines…" Straight talking from the design legend

Apply the rules of perspective and bring new depth to your art – see page 84

VIEW TO A SKILL MASTER THREE-POINT PERSPECTIVE, BY MARC SIMONETTI

More than just a pretty face.

Flesh out the concept
with 3D characters

Let the technical go and
your creativity flow

Conquer the challenge
in record time
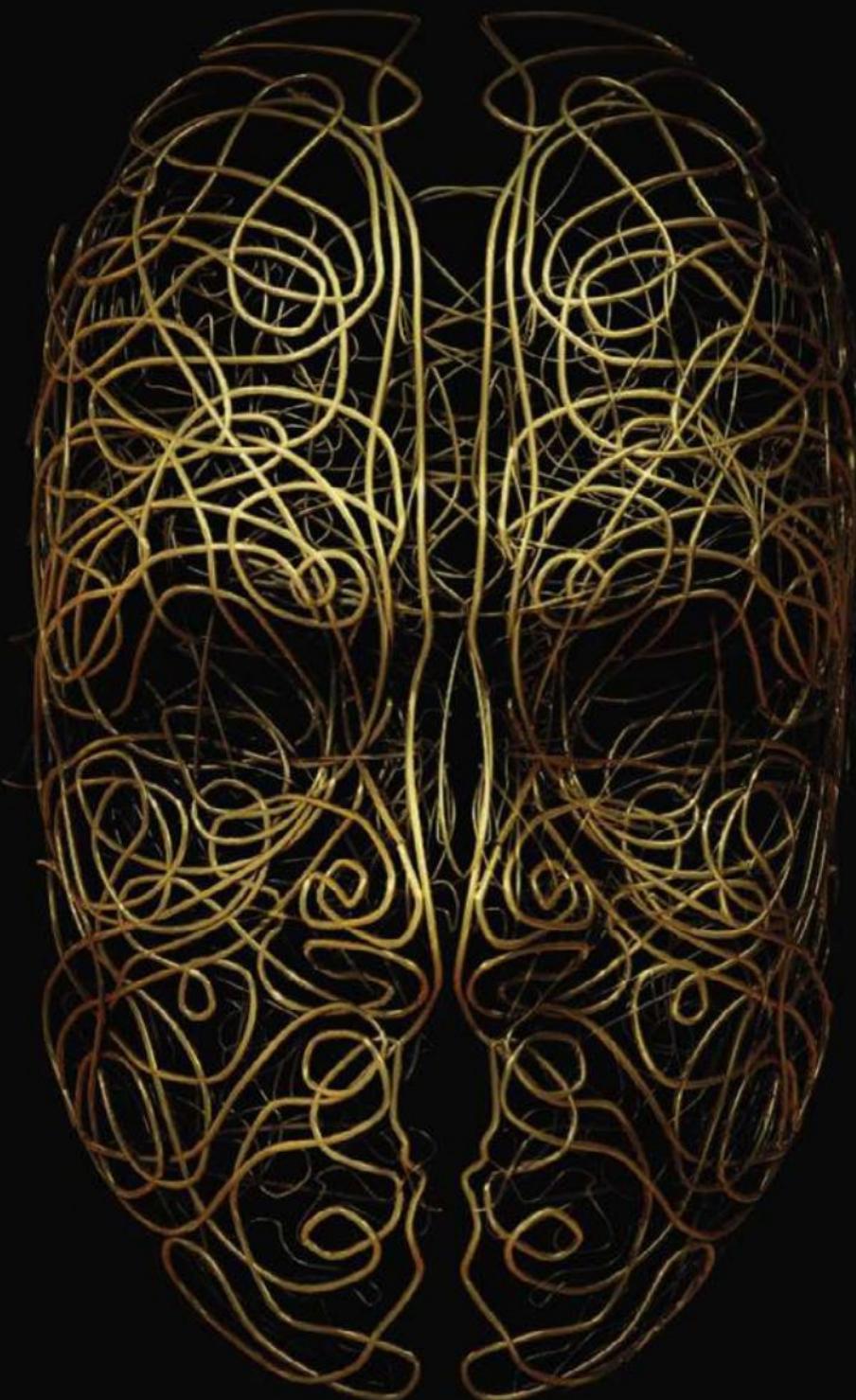
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Welcome. . .
to a knockout issue

Depending on where you reside on this planet of ours, you may either be eagerly waiting for, or have seen the film Sucker Punch. Described by an ImagineFX reader on Twitter as looking like, "Someone taking a year's worth of ImagineFX content and putting it in a film," it's no surprise that we're all over this film. Not only is our cover Sucker Punch-inspired (see page 68 for how Dan LuVisi crafted this image), we also got to shoot the breeze with concept artist Joel Chang about his time working on the film. How cool is that? Go see on page 44.

In other cool news we're now available as a digital download for both subscriptions and single issues! **www.zinio.com/imaginefx** is the website to visit. We're also working on getting our back issues for sale (yes, and the much-requested early ones, too!), so keep checking Zinio to see what's available. Turn to page 66 for more info and prices.

Even more astounding news is that we're now officially the number one-selling magazine for digital artists. So, if you've sent in your art, created a workshop for us or just bought the magazine and enjoyed it, then I thank you for your support over the past few years. We've had a great time putting the magazine together and in the following pages I hope it shows not only how much we enjoy doing it, but also our admiration for the awe-inspiring art that's on show.

Okay, that's enough of me wibbling on – go and enjoy the issue!

Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
claire@imaginefx.com

Our special cover for subscribers this issue.

Subscribe now! Turn to pages 34 & 78

Introducing...

Featured artists

Every month, ImagineFX calls on some of the finest artists in the world to offer you the best guidance and to share their techniques and inspiration…

Joel Chang

Los Angeles-based concept artist Joel Chang has worked on some of Hollywood's biggest movies, including the forthcoming Transformers: Dark of the Moon. On page 44 we find out about his art, personal and professional, and find out what it took to bring Sucker Punch's genre hotpot to the big screen.
chemicalbank.org

Craig Sellars

A former Disney artist turned freelancer, Craig has worked across film and video games, but it's his personal projects that steal your gaze. Juxtaposing fresh ideas with a love of old pulp sci-fi and noir movies Craig's paintings ooze atmosphere. Discover his traditional approach to digital art on page 58.
www.greensocksart.com

Kan Muftic

Concept artist Kan has the enviable job of working at Rocksteady Studios on the new Batman Arkham City video game. He took time out from designing the Dark Knight to explore Painter's oil techniques. Kan has crafted a unique, traditional feeling image in Painter. Learn some new tricks on page 74.
kanmuftic.blogspot.com

Marc Simonetti

A freelance artist for five years, Marc has created concepts for film and video games and cover art for authors including Terry Pratchett. His knack for creating dramatic scenes comes to the fore on page 84 as Marc explores the use of three-point perspective, showing how these rules can dominate composition.
www.marcsimonetti.com

Erin Kelso

Florida-based Erin is a science teacher by day and freelance artist by night. Working traditionally, but using modern techniques. Over on page 80 she shows how to turn line art into a finished dark fantasy painting in Photoshop, using texture overlays to give the feel of a watercolour illustration.
bluefooted.deviantart.com

Ian McQue

A concept artist, illustrator and art director at Rockstar North, Ian likes to experiment with digital media, using Photoshop, Illustrator and 3ds Max to create stunning steampunk airship paintings. He draws on everyday objects for inspiration, and on page 90 Ian shows us how he works his magic.
mcqueconcept.blogspot.com
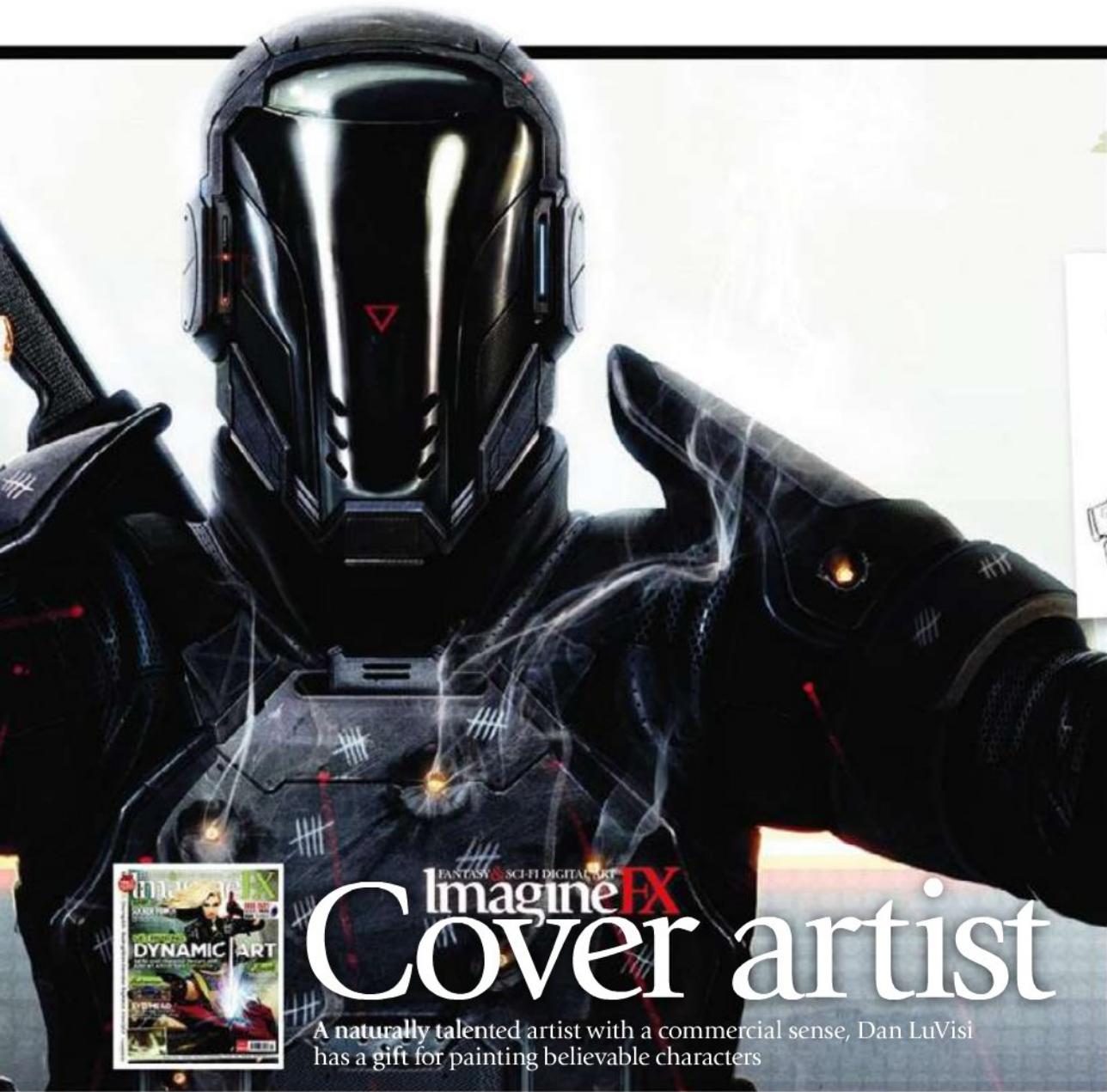
ImagineFX
FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
Cover artist

A naturally talented artist with a commercial sense, Dan LuVisi has a gift for painting believable characters

Dan LuVisi

COUNTRY: US
SOFTWARE: Photoshop
WEB: www.danluvisiart.com

Dan always had a talent for art and began working in video games as a concept artist while still in high school. He's since worked across film, video games and comics; he's currently negotiating to create his own comic book and has recently sold his first book, LMS: Killbook of a Bounty Hunter, to Paramount Pictures to be turned into a movie. There's no stopping him!

see more of Dan's work at
danielluvisiart.blogspot.com

How Dan brought his lady to life…

Inspired by Sucker Punch, we wanted a heroine in a post-action pose. Dan's first sketches are fantastic, but too similar to his renowned Last Man Standing characters.

Dan's next sketch is closer to what we're after – a younger-feeling character and great pose, but it feels too close to the composition of our last issue. Gah!

The new pose has a great impact moment that we're after, and the dynamism is spot on. We just request a few tweaks to the robot's head and position and it's done!

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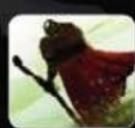
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Put your comps in perspective

Video workshops on your free DVD…
Where you see this badge you'll find an accompanying video workshop in the corresponding folder on your DVD.

VIDEO WORKSHOP ON THE DVD

ON YOUR DVD
This month's essential art resources…

3D model bonanza from DAZ 3D!
Feisty heroines, swords, guns and more!

224 anatomy reference photos
Practise your life-drawing skills.

DRAW AMAZING ART THAT SOARS

Reader FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Yuriy Mazurkin

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SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop

"When I was child everything amazed me – clouds, birds, all objects of reality," says Yuriy. "I always strived to catch the essence of this beauty, to become a part of it."

This passion led him to study traditional art at Moscow's Art Lyceum, then the Art Institute. "It took me 14 years to learn how to transfer the image I had in my head on paper or on canvas, but when I did, I got a job in game development." His aim has always been clear: "I love the techniques of classical painting, which artists have practised for centuries, and I try to apply them to digital art."

1 DANCING GENIE "I was inspired by the art of the great Russian painter Vasily Vereshchagin. I was keen to convey the effect of illumination, created from the blinding southern sun. This is my first experience of drawing a woman's figure purely out of my head without any references."

2 CANNONEER "Here I've portrayed the pirates who attack the enemy ship and tried to depict the madness of battle, frozen at the moment the gunner shouts, 'Fire!' This piece was created for a magazine's cover to promote the game project by the Seaward.ru Team, although the game's now in limbo."

ARTIST OF THE MONTH

Yuriy wins himself a copy of Exotique 5 and Character Modeling 3. To find out more about these two indispensable art resources, go to www.ballisticpublishing.com.

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

Artist crit

**Concept artist Jan Ditlev Christensen feels that
Yuriy has captured a great cinematic moment**

"I love the way the central pirate remains
focused, while the others are affected by the
mayhem that surrounds them. I feel like I'm
there and I'm eager to see how it plays out."

Ami Moore

LOCATION: Canada
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

As a jobbing freelancer living in Toronto, Ami keeps busy in between gigs by illustrating her own stories. "Really, all I want to do with my illustrations is to tell a story that can charm or engage people," she says. "I'm at a stage in my life where there are all kinds of new things to inspire and learn from, and this is something I hope will never change."

1 FIGHT "This was an illustration for an article about women and fighting – the reasons why women fight. I remember this illustration being a challenge because it went through a lot of changes from the sketch to final under the art direction I had."

2 THE BOY WHO SAILED AROUND THE WORLD "This piece is from my illustrated children's story of the same name. It's from the beginning of the story, and this is the chase that leads to the source of his adventure. This was the first book I worked on and it was interesting to keep the style, characters and colour schemes consistent over the 30-something illustrations."

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

Eve Ventrue

LOCATION: Germany
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

As a digital fantasy artist, Eve has been creating characters for three years. "It's like an addiction," she says. "Every brush stroke creates a new life, and when your imagination comes to life you can even feel the breath and mood of your creation."

Inspired by game art and popular artists that include Luis Royo, Eve has a dream: "To create art for games and film productions – that would be the cat's meow!"

1 THE HUNTER "I wanted to create a dark piece considering death and its force of fascination. The light needed to focus on the warrior and skull – the ephemeral nature of life. Before I even started the piece I already had a clear idea of how the painting should look. So I began with a dark background and blocked in the warm colour tones, then painted the face, armour and skull. Finally, I added details and light with extra emphasis on the skull."

2 ONCE "This artwork was inspired by Assassin's Creed – I love Altair! My intention was to show a warrior with a strong relationship to heaven yet who's on the other side, struggling with his evanescent faith towards it."

3 VIVAT CORONA "I love knights. The artwork needed to convey the atmosphere of a fearless and majestic warrior going to war. I merged his armour with the warm light around him and made his horse completely in tune on him. Just a calm second before the struggle starts."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"I love Eve's dusty knight. It's a great concept and not overly detailed; there are enough elements to make her character feel unique without over-complicating the design. Stunning."
Ian Dean,
Deputy Editor
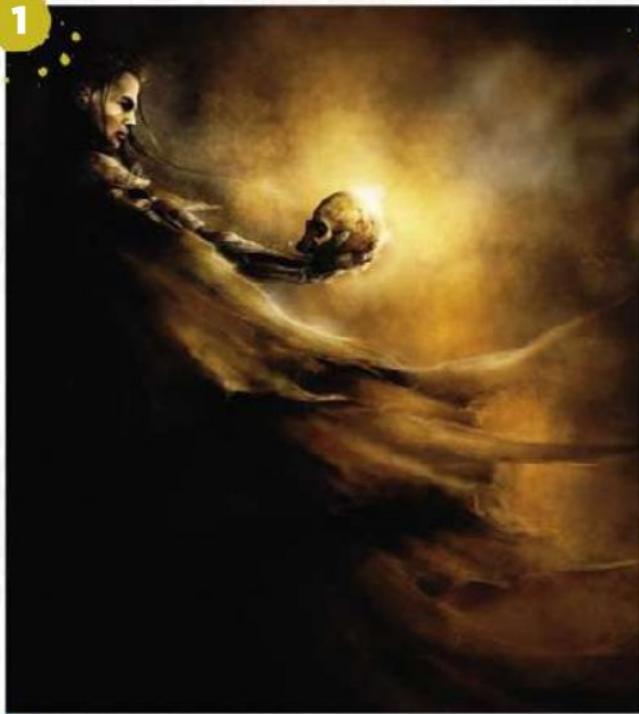
🇺🇸 Jael Segura
LOCATION: US
WEB: jaelsegura.com
EMAIL: jaelsegura@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"I'm a Minnesota-based fine art student who loves to create digital art and freelance in my spare time," says Jael. "I've been creating art for years, but became passionate about digital art a few years ago. A teacher saw promise in what I did and gifted me a Wacom tablet, which has been one of my primary tools ever since."

Jael would love to work professionally at some point. "Being able to connect with people through my art and find my own voice are things I strive for every day."

1 WHAT A LOVELY SIGHT "This was created with Photoshop. It began as a simple sketch that kind of snowballed into something bigger. I don't often use pinks in my art, but this was a fun way to do so."

2 THE CARDINAL RULE "As we go through life we create rules for ourselves that define who we are. But these self-imposed restrictions can end up rooting us to a single spot in stagnation. Sometimes we need to look at what we've done, and change it, or we wind up doomed to stay in one place forever. "

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

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2

Brynn Metheney
LOCATION: US
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Raised in the Mojave Desert, Brynn moved to the Bay Area in 2006 to study illustration at California College of the Arts and Crafts. "I have always had an interest in creature design and fictional ecosystems, and my work is influenced by evolution, science, and my own fascination with animals," she says.

Her observational art means Brynn's a perfect fit for ImagineFX's Q&A team, and is evident in her personal project The Morae River, which she plans on making into a book.

1 ITCHY "I always think it's interesting to draw fictional creatures doing really mundane things. I feel as though it makes the animal more natural and lifelike. Scratching one's neck is something most animals here on Earth do. This piece was also an exercise in expression and anatomy, and it's looser than my normal work."

2 WYVERN RIDER "This piece actually started out with a child riding a wyvern through friendly skies. Later, it turned into more of a serious piece. I wanted to really focus on not creating a typical wyvern, but one with more mammalian features. This piece was intended for promotion, but I might do more with the characters later."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"While Brynn's wyvern image is the more immediate of the two, the beast that's scratching away makes a more lasting impression, simply because it's grounded in reality. We've all seen cats and dogs do it, so why wouldn't this… thing?"
Cliff Hope,
Operations Editor

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2

🇩🇪 Heiko Nerenz
LOCATION: Germany
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Growing up in Potsdam, Heiko was as inspired by the beautiful architecture of his hometown, as well as by the tales of Wilhelm Busch and the Brothers Grimm. "In my childhood, I filled papers with watercolour and ink, pencil and fine liner, capturing my surroundings," he says. "It always felt natural to me to draw, to express with the lines coming out of my arm – the extended speech."

1 SEPULCHRE OF LORES "Imagine that as you grow up, what you believed in as a kid is being left behind and forgotten. Later you find that it was all true; every fairy and every tale, every myth, all the creatures and fables. But on the way back to your memories of the wonderful pictures and words, you're going to cross the graveyard of all that."

2 ROMPING IN THE RIG "When there's a furious and feared warrior to be raised, start early. While I thought about where to put that little guy, I was actually sitting on the answer already. Crouching on all four, over my floorboards, I studied scratches in the wood and how it reflects and shines. As you can see, the mace is still way too heavy for the kid, so he has to drag it over the planks."

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

Xiao wei Li
LOCATION: The Netherlands
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SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop

Xiao says that he was "spoon-fed manga and anime from an early age", but he only really started drawing in high school. Inspired by the Gundam series, he drew his own variations of the mechanical suits, and this lead to a self-published manga.

"I recently graduated, so I haven't had a colourful career or anything, but I wish to pursue both a career in concept art and product design," he says. "My goal is to make clever designs, both in products and art."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"They say that eyes are a window to a person's soul. In Xiao's characters' eyes he deftly captures the adventurous menace of his ninja and the sultry alluring gaze of his femme fatale, too. Captivating."
Claire Howlett, Editor

1 MODERN KUNOICHI "What would a ninja look like in modern times? Well, you'd probably never see them. But if you did, I imagine they would have Kevlar armour, gas masks and so on, all poured into a skin-tight catsuit. I used Photoshop for this one. I was really on a tight deadline, so I crunched it out in record-breaking time."

2 FEMME FATALE "The assignment was to make a film noir femme fatale. Of course, she wouldn't be too fatale without a smoking Derringer gun. I used subtle grey hue variations and I wanted to make sure that translated well to print, so I had to make this one in Photoshop, because Painter doesn't work in CMYK."

3 GUN TAN MK 2 "This is my version of Gundam-girl parody in a what-if-it-was-really-possible fashion. A big inspiration here was motorcycle design. I love the way they combine panels and visible mechanics. This piece was done in Painter. In designing it, I tried to apply industrial design techniques."

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

🇺🇸 **Carly B Sorgee**
LOCATION: US
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Carly took to art because "I wanted to make things that didn't exist real. Besides art, I'm fascinated by science and a lot of my inspiration comes from mixing biological forms in new ways." She first picked up a tablet and Photoshop in 2004, and they've been her main mediums ever since.

Recently graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design, Carly is just starting her career as an artist in the entertainment industry, as well as doing illustration and comic work. "It's hard work, but art is one of the most rewarding aspects of my life."

1 THIEF "I wanted to portray a larger narrative in progress, with elements hinting at what was happening. Comparing what I think is going on with what other people get from the picture is fun, and a good study in storytelling."

2 PROFESSOR SULLIVAN'S STEAMY STOMPY "I drafted the design out on paper, scanned it and painted it in Photoshop. I like working digitally, but I get better precision when it's on paper. The play of light in the reflectivity of metal was both a headache and a joy."

3 NECROMANTIC SHAMAN "This started as a pencil drawing and I drew out the forms organically, to follow a kind of swirling pattern. I had a vague idea about a sorcerer, and the bones and animal parts reminded me of a tribal necromancer."

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

James Edwin Stevens
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SOFTWARE: Painter

Imaginative worlds, mythological creatures, and beautiful heroines have continually fascinated James. "When I was younger I would fill up little notebooks with tonnes of monster sketches," he says. "But today my drive in fantasy art comes from my love of fantasy-based games."

He has taught digital illustration at the Ringling College of Art and at Syracuse University. He also freelances for gaming companies.

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"By limiting the colour palette in Wrapped Around Her Finger, James keeps the focus on the composition and character. And a solid grasp of colour theory makes her pop out from the scene. Less *is* more."
Paul Tysall,
Art Editor

1 HELL HATH NO FURY "This piece depicts an original character that I created, battling a horde of wraiths. With this piece I wanted to show off the power of the character, and what better way than battling tonnes of enemies at once?"

2 WRAPPED AROUND HER FINGER "While this piece has an erotic vibe, I think the strength of the work lies within its composition. I really wanted to use the natural, whimsical nature of snakes to create a truly interesting composition. I believe this adds depth to the piece, making it more than just a pin-up."

Martin de Diego Sádaba

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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Martin has been creating his delightfully dark illustrations for 10 years. "I began as a realist, surreal, dark, fantasy painter and portrait artist," he says. "I was working on big canvases with acrylics, but five years ago I bought my first Wacom and all that changed."

He's worked on commercial books, posters, magazines, websites and games, and continues to explore his particular personal style of work in his proposed book project, Divine Paradox.

1 CHALLENGER OF DEATH "The concept is a mixture of the Challengers of Death from Carlos Castaneda's books and Lich creatures from the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing games."

2 LEFT SHOULDER COMPANION "I mixed the concept of the already-dead models of early photography and the idea of your own dead as friend, companion and master."

3 GOLDEN AGE "This began as a speed exercise of a non-referenced female portrait, but then it morphed into something else."

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com
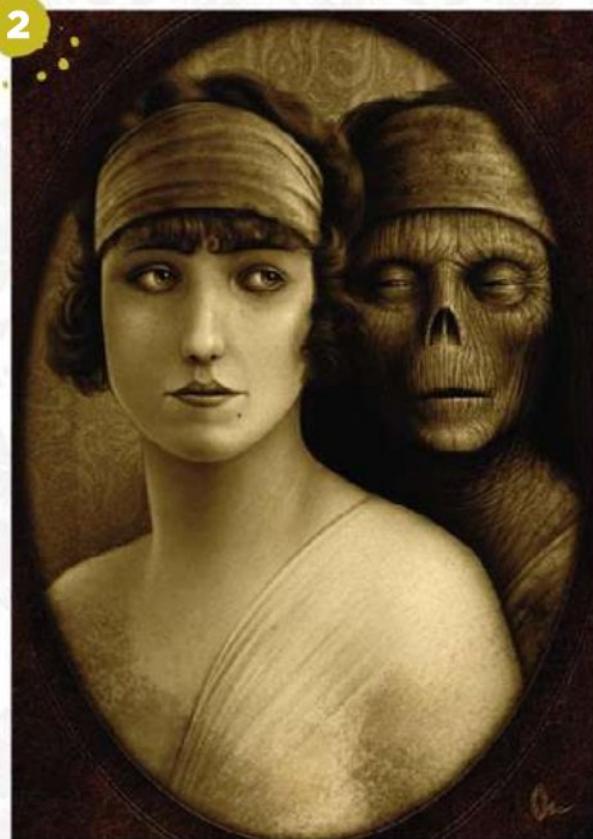
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IMAGINEFX CRIT

"I love how Martin imbibes his art with the ever-present inevitability of death. It's in his take on death itself, a woman befriending the perished, or a portrait of youth chained to an eternity beyond flesh. Well, that's how I see it, anyway."
Beren Neale,
Staff Writer

Author of the future

Decade in review A new book celebrates Syd Mead's work over the past decade. We speak to the concept art legend about his day job and his inspirations

Celebrating his 78th birthday this July, Syd Mead shows no sign of slowing down his art output. Having recently finished work on new film Elysium, by District 9 director Neill Blomkamp, Syd's also just released Sentury II, a book that looks back over a decade of his art. It boasts exquisitely detailed projects that range from film prop designs to his latest vehicle constructions, all as detailed as they are grand, and all unmistakably created by Syd Mead.

A thread ties the work together. "Any designer's fondest hope is for a design to be future-proof," Syd tells us. "I have created automotive designs that still compete today in super car categories over 40 years later. My designs seem to possess a sense that travels well down the stylistic time line." No coincidence, then, that Syd has long shunned the archaic title of concept artist in preference for 'visual futurist'.

No matter how futuristic his art is, however, Syd still revisits bedrock designs like the '59 Cadillac Coupe de Ville for inspiration. "I admire it as the ultimate iconic design expression of mass produced automobiles," he says. "The exuberance is evident in its generous proportions and
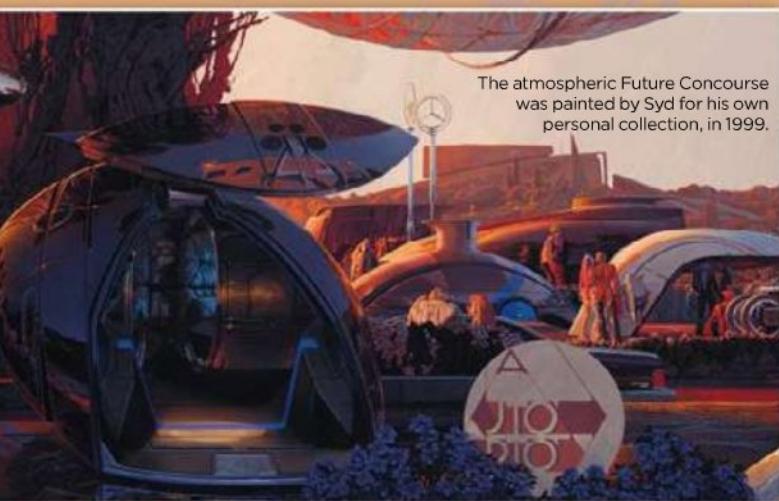
The atmospheric Future Concourse was painted by Syd for his own personal collection, in 1999.
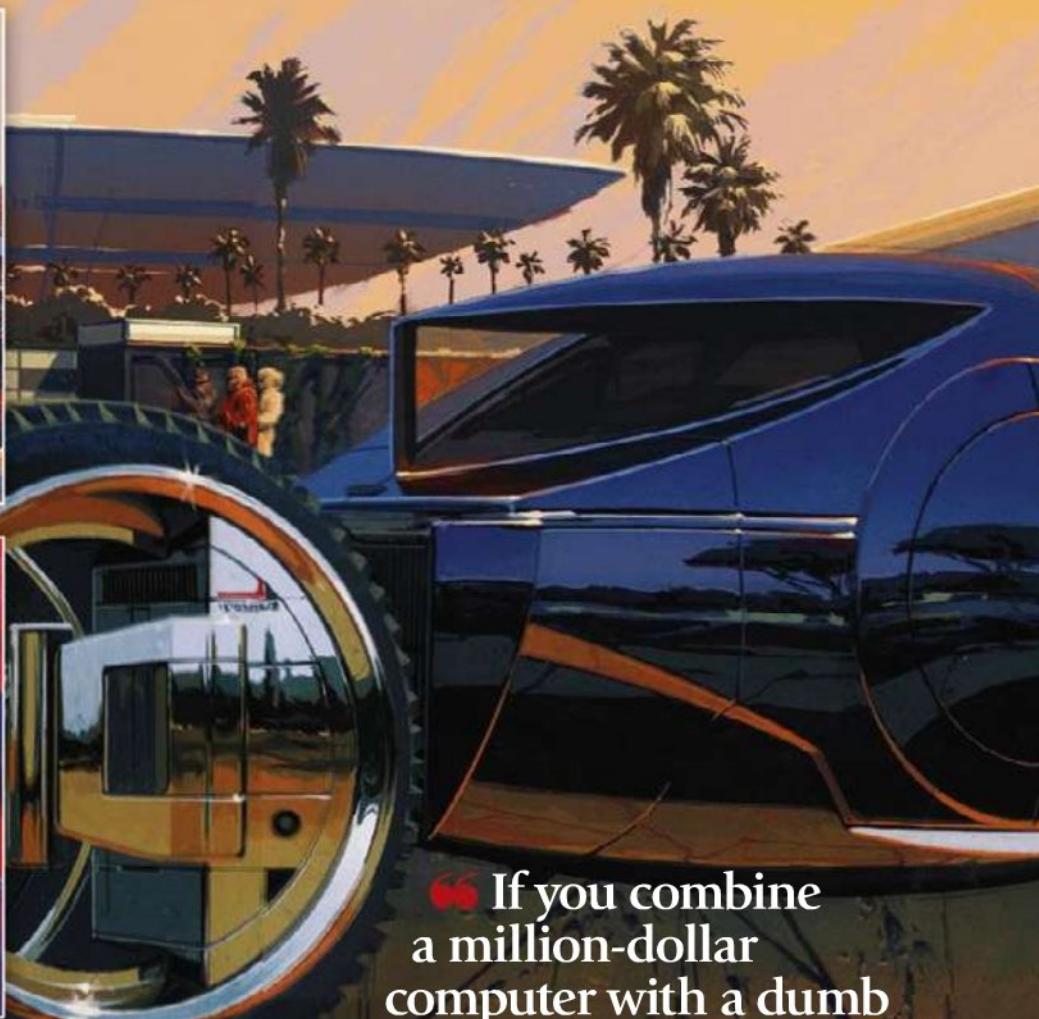
Future Lifestyle Scenario: Excite (2008). "I received an email that presented a fascinating proposal involving both design and illustrative narrative, showcasing the client's long-term corporate profile," says Syd. "The challenge was to invent four scenarios that featured various personal lifestyle artefacts which complemented the premise of each of the four illustrated scenarios."

❝ If you combine a million-dollar computer with a dumb idea, you end up with a million-dollar dumb idea ❞

LEARN FROM THE BEST
Industry artists from the likes of Disney, DreamWorks and Pixar are doubling as tutors to offer masterclasses to aspiring artists.
Page 23

HORSES FOR COURSES
The Dark Horse Comics Presents anthology series returns in April, including talents such as Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin and Neal Adams.
Page 24

KEEP IT CASUAL
Using her daughter for inspiration, video games artist Svetlana Sablina delivers the fairy-tale goods as lead artist on Playrix's 4 Elements II.
Page 26

in the attention to alignment (and ancillary elements, such as the tail light cluster and the double grille design of the front end)." Some would disagree with his choice. "There are those who consider the '59 Cadillac an affront to design in general," he admits. "They are grey, bombastic philistines who can't separate design from pre-emptive social pretentiousness."

Syd believes that a thorough appreciation of what has gone before is essential for all budding visual futurists. "Designers in any field should have an appreciation of what has been both popular and prescient before they mount the visibility platform," he says.

"Without an appreciation of classical icons, even of cliché, their offerings are often contrived and destined for the heap of trite stylistic discards."

Syd's first venture into books resulted in his renowned film work. "In the 1960s I created a series of elaborately illustrated books for United States Steel, glamourising the use of steel in vehicular fabrication." His books Concepts and Innovations went world-wide in less than three years of release. "Two film special effects producers in Hollywood used those books as inspiration while attending college," recalls Syd, "and when their job for Paramount ➤➤

A tad more roadtrip on Mars than OAP bus tour of the Cotswolds (to our eyes at least), Megacoach was done by Syd for his own personal collection, in 2006.

Van: Profile was created by Syd for English automotive magazine Intersection, in 2004.

SCOTT ROBERTSON
Vehicle designer and Sentury II publisher on why Syd's still relevant

What was your reaction on first seeing Syd's art?
It had an immediate impact on me. Not only for the fantastic futuristic design content, but also the skill he communicated these designs with. He is a master draftsman, in addition to being a great designer.

What's the secret to his success?
He's simply amazing when it comes to consistency. His work still exemplifies all of the mastery of the mediums he uses when exploring new conceptual scenarios. The only thing that's changed in the last decade is the variety of subjects. But then he's always explored new and exciting themes to keep the rest of us in awe.

How did you feel about publishing Syd's work?
It was more than a little scary – I really wanted it to live up to his high standards and for it to be a beautiful book for his fans to enjoy. When the first advance copies landed and the book looked great I could relax. I felt honoured to have helped him share his work with the rest of the world.

**How does Syd fit in with the current breed of high-profile concept artists?**
There's a lot of amazing design in movies and video games, but when it comes to mastery of technique and storytelling through imagery, we haven't quite caught up with Syd yet.

Scott, a designer and lecturer, founded Design Studio Press and releases art tutorial DVDs with The Gnomon Workshop.

www.designstudiopress.com
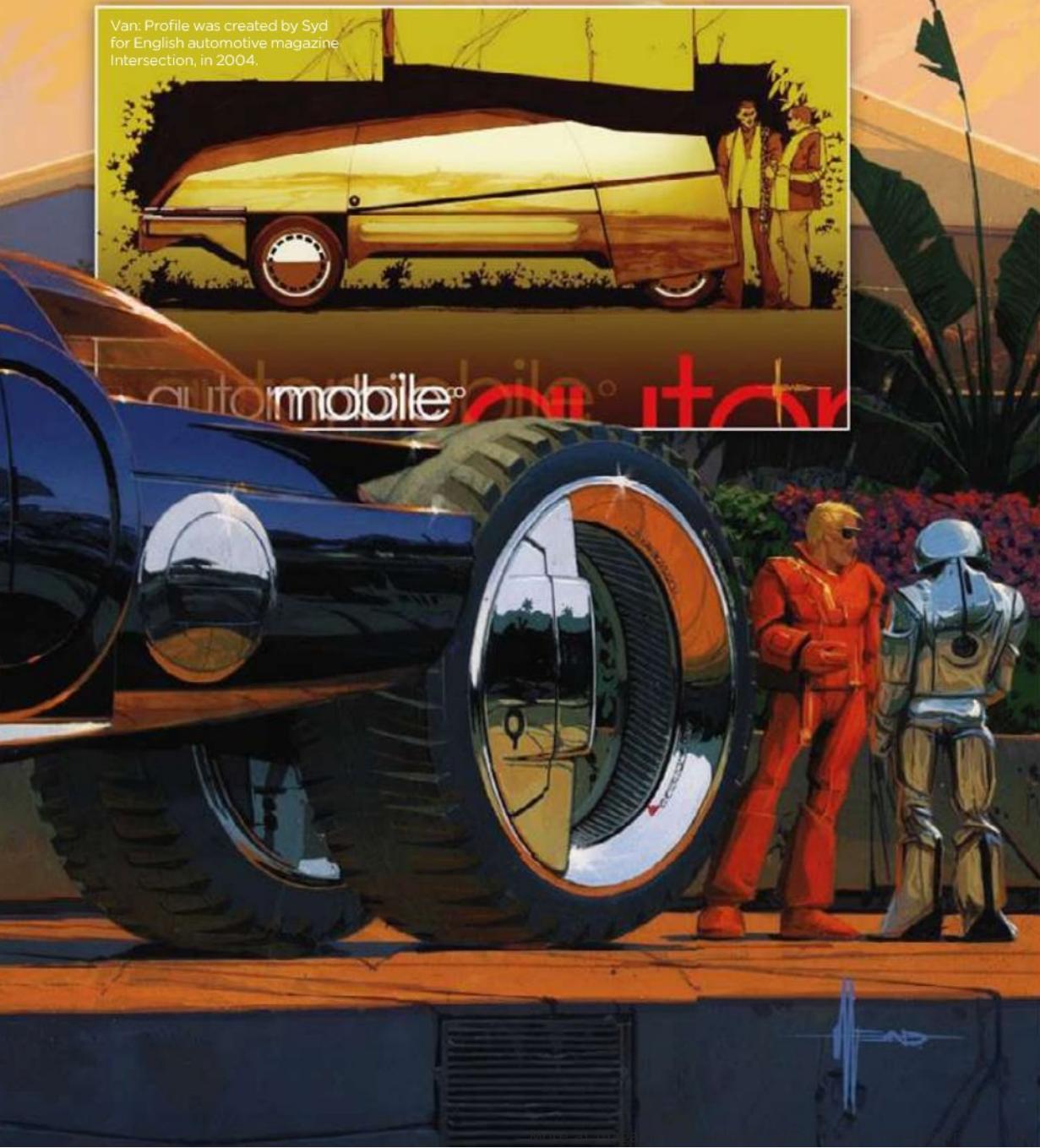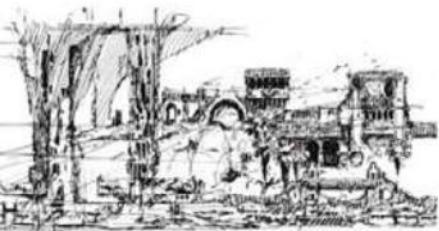
Syd's Facade Sketch For Game Environment, also from Sentury II.

called for imagining an immense alien entity [V'Ger, for Star Trek: The Motion Picture] they called me." Syd went on to create pre-production design for Blade Runner, TRON, Aliens and Short Circuit, to name but a few.

Syd has contributed killer concept art to some stinkers, too. But he says he separates the two processes of visualising a film and telling the story of the film. "To design anything there has to be a story, but that story can be one's private invention for creative convenience or a scenario provided by the client," he explains. "I never imagine anything devoid of its ambience. In this way, the result projects its own validity relative to itself."

Syd has started using digital tools, though he's not yet enamoured by the medium. "If you combine a million-dollar computer with a dumb idea, you end up with a million-dollar dumb idea," he says. Yet he's learned to use Google SketchUp to create designs for a new restaurant project.

Whatever the medium, the spark of inspiration that forced him to pick up a pencil at the age of two-and-a-half is still there. "Design is an enveloping activity for anyone who pursues that way of earning a living," he says. "Any small occurrence – noticing detail, like the shift of shadow and light on a summer-lit patio – all provides inspiration at the humbling complexity of thought, of imagination and of a sense of personal relevance."

See our review of Syd Mead's Sentury II on page 106.

Bon comic!

Success story Comic debut issue stolen by famous French thief

We covered games artist Nate Simpson's conversion to comic art back in issue 55. Since then his comic, Nonplayer, has got a 6 April release date – and the official thumbs up from a comics legend.

Nate's friend Joe Keatinge, took an advance copy of Nonplayer #1 to the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France. "I got a long-distance call from an out-of-breath Joe," says Nate, "who said 'sorry, Moebius just stole your comic.'" Joe had gone up to the comic art master after a lecture. Moebius's reaction was simple: "Very cool, beautiful – may I have it?"

The comic centres on delivery girl Dana Stevens. See more Nonplayer art here: **projectwaldo.blogspot.com**.

Dana's real life is a grind, but she distinguishes herself as an elite assassin in an online fantasy game.

Moebius giving Nonplayer the thumbs up at the Angoulême International Comics Festival.

Paul isn't your average family-friendly alien. He loves a wisecrack and a cigarette.

Take me to your dealer

Film art Mike Elizalde on redefining grey aliens and geeking out while working on the film Paul

Mike Elizalde, art director at Spectral Motion, experienced plenty of highlights while working on the recently released sci-fi comedy film Paul. The main one? "Meeting Simon Pegg and Nick Frost," he says. "My son and I must have watched Shaun of the Dead 20 times, so it was definitely a geek-out moment."

The studio provided concept art, character development and final model creation of the film's eponymous character. "We were redefining the traditional grey alien," says Mike.

"Paul's pretty irreverent, making wisecracks and smoking all the time."

As well as finishing work on Paul, Mike recently wrapped up on Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters and now has the enviable task of working on Guillermo del Toro's take on HP Lovecraft's At The Mountains of Madness.

You can see more on all that here: **www.spectralmotion.com**.

Passing the torch

Online workshops CGMW is offering digital art masterclasses with experienced industry artists

DreamWorks artist Ted Davis's idea behind the CG Master Workshops site was always simple: to provide digital art tutorials that are low cost but high quality. After years of planning, a group of experienced artists turned the theory into practice in late 2010.

The idea was born during Ted's industry-related travels. "I've seen a huge deficit of industry-trained/experienced professionals teaching aspiring artists," says Ted. "I then thought how awesome it would be to give students this amazing opportunity – something we didn't get at university."

CGMW was always meant to be more than a cosmetic solution. Ted and the other artists behind it wanted to "provide students with the chance to learn from the best in our field, the tricks and techniques needed to not only break into the entertainment industry, but thrive in it." With decades of combined experience, the artists behind the site come from studios including Disney, Blizzard, DreamWorks, Pixar and Digital Domain.

Regardless of the names, this is not an exclusive website. "Especially with current global economic conditions," says Ted, "it was important to create something affordable for most artists, no matter

Top-end artists from the likes of Disney, DreamWorks and Pixar are doubling as tutors.

what part of the world they lived in." CGMW went live with seven workshops at $25 each. "We're now producing an additional six workshops, along with a host of brand new masterclasses," he tells us.

But the work doesn't stop there. "I don't think there's been a moment when we have not been fine-tuning our site," Ted says. "We're in a relentless pursuit of perfection, whether behind the scenes or through listening to the desires, suggestions and support of our greatest asset: our students." Have a look at what the site has to offer: **www.cgmwmasterclasses.com.**

In short...

The latest news in brief for digital artists

Comics Classic

The Dark Horse Comics Presents monthly anthology series is back, and hits the stores on 20 April. This new series will include a mix of comic talent, including Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin and Neal Adams. See more at **bit.ly/hZdqlE**.

It's war! World challenge

The fifth annual Dominance War digital art competition has been launched, and the site is buzzing with new art that's coming in thick and fast. And don't expect it to die down for another month or two, because the best 3D and 2D game art is showcased at **www. dominancewar.com**.

Explore Fine art

Want to visit the world's finest art galleries, but can't afford the cost of travel? Then explore them from your computer through Google Art Project. View loads of great pieces of art, start a collection, then pop out into the city for a stroll at **www.googleartproject.com**.

My drawing table for when I prefer to hand sketch. I'm left handed and so – naturally – it's on my left-hand side.

A tub of protein supplement that's never been opened. The studio went through a bit of a fitness craze, but buying these and leaving them to collect dust on my desk was as far as I went.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE
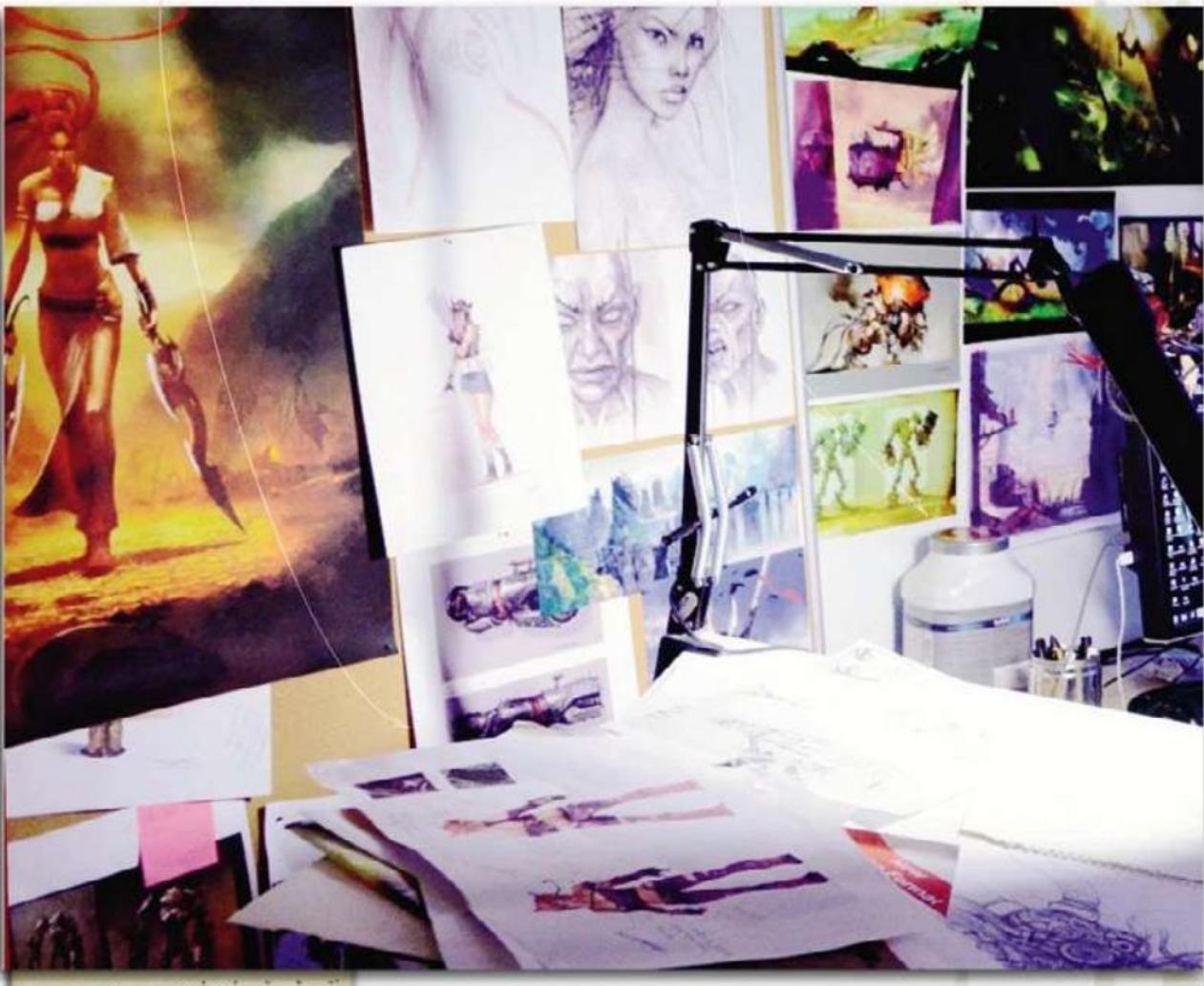
Alex Taini

Art Ninja 'Enslaved' at Ninja Theory, Alex still gets to work on some fantastic game art

My workspace sits within the bigger of the two wings in the Ninja Theory studio. The studio is an open-plan office that houses a team of around 100 staff in the centre of Cambridge, England. Being open plan helps with communication, both within the art team and between teams. It's good that everyone can see what I'm working on and the direction I'm taking the art.

I chose the position of my desk in the office for a number of reasons. First, I get a lot of natural light coming from the window behind my monitors, which eliminates any glare on my screens. Second, if I want I can make my corner of the room very dark, which enables me to concentrate on the finer details of my work.

I work digitally and in pencil, so my set-up includes a touch screen for digital sketching, a normal monitor and a drawing table. My bookcase is filled with books that I like to use for reference. These include art books like The Art of Fifth Element, one of my favourite movies. The book was a present from one of my friends and great comic artists Alessandro Barbucci. I've also got books of master painters, such as Klimt, Caravaggio; comic artists like Koji Morimoto, Moebius and

A very limited edition Monkey statue. Everyone in the office was given one as a gift.

An ever-growing pile of books that I've designed the covers for.

My reference books covering movies, art and photography.

My source of natural light and a fairly unexciting view.
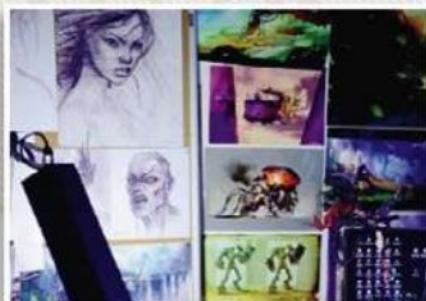
Lots of images from Heavenly Sword and Enslaved. It's good to keep in mind our work so far.

I use the Cintiq tablet to sketch and add details to my paintings.

Enki Bilal; and great photographers such as Floria Sigismondi. I also have a few novels on my desk that I created the covers for.

The walls around my desk are covered in artwork from past and present projects. We have a distinctive art style at Ninja Theory and by having the artwork on the walls we're constantly reminded of what we've done in the past and the style that we should try to maintain throughout our future work. Often the walls will also feature reference images. Photographs, images of buildings, paintings... anything really that represents the style that we're aiming for in our current project.

Alex has been at Ninja Theory for seven years. He began as a concept artist, and is now a visual director. See his art at www.talexiart.com.

+deviantWATCH

Here are some of the many gems we found on the pages of deviantART…

Wiebke Scholz

aeyolscaer.deviantart.com

From pirouetting riot police to rainbow-coloured squirrots (!), Wiebke's fantasy art flirts with the irreverent, backed up with great concepts and obvious skill. There's also a set of beautifully drawn traditional scrolls that make this site a varied delight.

ATArts

atarts.deviantart.com

There are epic fantasy landscapes, perfectly rendered comic character paintings, dynamic action scenes, even a Mini amalgamated with a stormtrooper, but the most striking of all the images here are the sublime still-life paintings on show – dead still yet full of life.

Jonas De Ro

jenovah-art.deviantart.com

Great, enchanting, concept art are the watchwords for Jonas's site. There's also some breathtaking post-apocalyptic work here, but it's the side streets and momentarily deserted inner city art that really captivates, such as Urban Jungle and Office Days (pictured).

Life Is Humiliation
by Matt Boyce

Fantasy talk Explaining the inexplicable

"Nothing beats looking at horns in books, online, in zoos and museums."

When she's not painting cool creature concepts, Brynn Metheney's days must fly by…

"The little fairy sleeping on a flower is inspired by my daughter, when she was very little," says Svetlana Sablina.

Keep it casual

It's elementary Casual game artist Svetlana Sablina delivers the goods

Having joined the ranks at Playrix Entertainment in 2006, Svetlana Sablina has worked on all its titles since, but is particularly proud of her artwork for the company's latest casual game, 4 Elements II.

She created most of the 2D art for the first 4 Elements game, which was released in 2008, and was lead artist in its sequel. "4 Elements was great," she says, "but the sequel is a huge step forward in terms of graphics and visual effects. There are three times more 2D and 3D artists working on the second instalment."

The general art style of the game has also evolved. "The concepts are based on the mixture of Disney, Pixar and manga characters, combined with my own experience and childhood memories," she says. "All things kind, bright, enchanting and full of light and magic." Find out more about the game here: **www.playrix.com**.

Lost and found

Oscar nod Shaun Tan's graphic novel The Lost Thing has become a critically acclaimed short, generating new concept art

It's safe to say that Shaun Tan is happy with the reception of his new animated short film The Lost Thing. Based on his award-winning picture book of the same name, it's won him an Oscar nomination in the Best Animated Short Film category this year, and by the time you read this Shaun may or may not be the owner of a gold statuette .

"For me, it's absolutely awesome," says Shaun, "but I mainly think about the nomination on behalf of our team – so many people sweated over it, contributed more than was asked for, and backed us along the way." The film stars Tim Minchin as the story's narrator, a caricature of Shaun as a teenager and, says the author, explores "notions of adult responsibilities and how being an artist fits into that."

Shaun created the original graphic novel over a decade ago, but made more concept art for the short, which was co-directed by Andrew Ruhemann. Revisiting the book was profound. "It's the first picture book that I independently conceived, wrote and illustrated," he says, "and it has a vague sense of autobiography about it."

See more art and if the film won at the Oscars here: **www.thelostthing.com.**

Shaun says The Lost Thing has elements of an autobiography.

Aussie comic Tim Minchin narrates the story in the film.

Free 3D models!

Looking good Check out this month's DVD for lots of free stuff from DAZ 3D

This month's DVD includes over $94-worth of DAZ 3D models, to be used in the free program DAZ Studio.

Going for guns'n'girls, with a side order of swords, the full model line-up is Omega Huntress X, Firearms Pack, V4 Gun Pose construction set, the Complete Samurai Bundle by Merlin, V4 Martial Arts Poses and the Victoria 4 Base. To get the most of the DAZ models, install DAZ Studio, which is also on the disc. And for more great models go to **www.daz3d.com**.
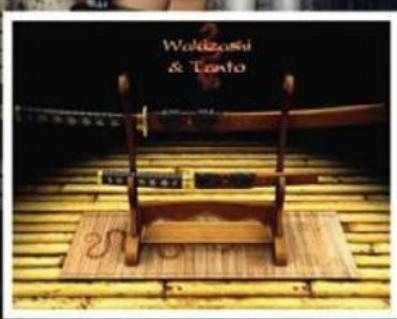
DAZ 3D's Samurai bundle will ensure your characters are ready to deal with hostile forces.

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX Forum
Winners

Image of the month

Song for sinners The deadly Grecian songstresses gets a sci-fi revamp by concept artist Max Hugo

This forum challenge enabled artist Max Hugo to totally reimagine the sirens of Greek mythology. "I went with a completely non-humanoid creature," says Max. "The original sirens were composite beings – women and birds – so I wanted the creature to be an inhabitant of the sea, but also with some bird-like parts."

Because sirens were also infamous for their treacherous song, Max suggested this with the creature's frog-like bag below its head and throat. "I also tried to mirror the sirens' song with these swirling, light and translucent wings," he says.

MYFX TITLE: Siren
WINNER: Max Hugo (Mhugo)
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/mhugo

Max's sci-fi siren is unrecognisable, but still retains some traditional elements.

FORUM CRIT

"Really good job at making an alien siren so convincing. I can imagine its ethereal song luring the ship. Well-placed storytelling elements, such at the ship's wreckage, strengthen the impact."
Hayley Merrington (paper-dreams)

MYFX THEME: Dracula
WINNER: Dave Brasgalla (Dave Brasgalla)
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/dave_brasgalla

"I was keen to avoid the visual stereotypes of Dracula and depict the Count as he's first described by Stoker: a cold, stark silhouette, on a field of warm colour."

MYFX THEME: Humbug
WINNER: Jack Crosby (jackrulztheworld)
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/jackrtw

"I wanted to get that Xmas feel, but also hint at a culture of these children-stealing elves that went before today's Christmas. I also focused on getting my lighting as aesthetically pleasing as possible."

MYFX THEME: Labyrinth
WINNER: Ian Core (g8crasherboy)
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/g8crasherboy

"In creating this, I used a number of custom brushes and tried hard not to over-render the image, keeping it relatively loose. I also used overlay layers for textures, and adjustment layers to finish."

MYFX THEME: Black Sheep
WINNER: Ciaran Lucas (Ciaranlucas)
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/ciaranlucas

"Ship design is well outside my comfort zone, so this was a good push into unfamiliar territory. I mocked up a quick 3D model and used this as a base for painting the ship itself, before adding it to my background."
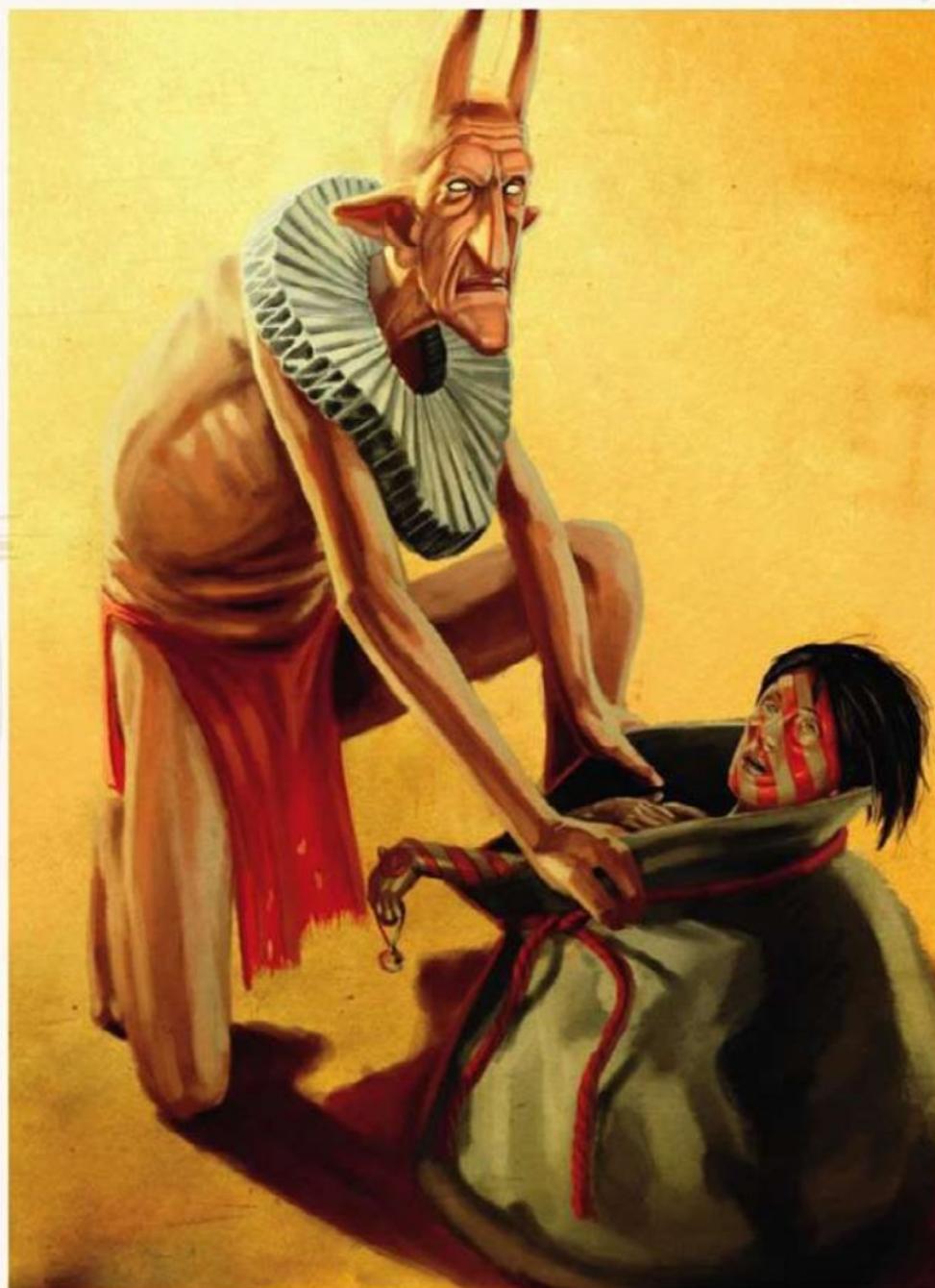
Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact the editor, Claire Howlett, on **claire@imaginefx.com** or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW, UK

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Michael's before and after cover art for The Legionnaire.

Your workshops work!

I wanted to express my gratitude at how much help ImagineFX has been to my digital art. I've been struggling to produce really well-rendered art in Photoshop, but after reading issue 66 and immersing myself in the workshops, I decided to give the cover of my comic, The Legionnaire, another shot. The improvement has been drastic – from my before and after images you can see the difference it's made. It's my goal to produce concept art for film and video games and I feel like I've taken a huge step in the right direction, so thank you.
Michael Lee-Graham, via email

Claire replies Great work, Michael. I'm glad we could help.

Traditional art skills

ImagineFX is my favourite magazine. The tutorials, workshops, interviews, reviews... everything is relevant and informative. However, I've noticed there's a lot of emphasis on the digital side of art. I think your tutorials shouldn't be limited to people with Photoshop and a graphics tablet. I know you feature traditional fantasy artists, but it would be a good idea to have some tutorials on traditional techniques, like acrylics, oils, watercolours and sculpture.
Jack Stollery, via email

I used to believe your magazine held no interest to a traditional artist like me. But I got a copy recently and I'm planning to subscribe. As an artist who's putting out his own comic series and dabbling in illustration, ImagineFX helps me keep abreast of what's going on in the world of science fiction and fantasy. I also like to be inspired by artists, regardless of whether they're digital or traditional. In the end, it doesn't matter whether you prefer pens and brushes or the drawing tablet, ImagineFX is useful and informative to all.
Max West, via email

Claire replies Two interesting letters with differing views. We're predominately a digital arts magazine, but over the years we've realised that traditional art also needs a place here too, so we've added more. Is it enough, or too much? Do we have the right balance? Let me know.

DID YOU MISS ISSUE 67?
We've still got a few copies, but you need to move fast! See opposite for details on how to get hold of a copy.

A recent workshop on sketching, but do we do enough on traditional art skills?

Absolutely fabulous

I started reading your magazine at issue 34 and subscribed soon after that. ImagineFX rarely fails to inspire, with the Q&A artist suggestions, directions to websites for reference ideas and the detailed reference photos on the DVD. In Peter Oedekoven's "Paint an homage and tell a story" workshop (issue 65) there's a support leg for the landing vehicle. There was a time when I would have thought, "Nice picture, but I have no need to draw a vehicle of this kind", and turned the page. But the reference photo on page 103 makes me look at machines, such as JCBs or Bobcats, from a different perspective. Inspirational and fabulous!

One suggestion for future workshops, however, would be for more along the lines of "How to draw and sketch".
David Wilson, via email

Claire replies Thanks for your views, David. We hope that even if you can't paint an image as good as the workshop one, you'll find a tip or technique to take into your own work. As for sketching workshops – we beat you to it! Our last two issues had a two-part workshop on how to sketch, with Justin Gerard. Hope you enjoyed them.

Our star letter writer wins a dA Premium Membership!
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Shopping for success

Everyone starts their letters like this, and I shall too. I've been a reader since issue 33, when I was 14. That isn't as far back as others, but that's still a lot of magazines taking up space in my room. I first saw ImagineFX while shopping with my mum and promptly smashed the trolley into her. A magazine about my dream career!?

Since then ImagineFX has been such an inspiration to me – I can't imagine (ahem) a more resourceful magazine. It's proved so helpful and I don't think I would have improved nearly as much as I have without it. I'm now 16 and have started a BTEC National Diploma in art, and hope one day to be a concept artist or on a par with some of the amazing people featured in here. Thank you so much for creating this magazine! Don't ever stop!
Betsy Carr, via email

Claire replies Betsy, you know we love receiving art from readers. Your work is fantastic, and I wish you the best of luck at art school.

Betsy's work from 2008 (left) and a recent piece show how much her art skills have improved.

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Boost your art skills with ImagineFX, the
world's best-selling creative magazine!

Artists' opinions

"ImagineFX is the best published source of conceptual art information that I have ever seen. The magazine is a must-have investment for any aspiring concept artist who wants to take their skills to the next level."
Andrew Jones, concept artist, Massive Black Inc

"ImagineFX is a unique resource for the science-fiction and fantasy community. It has invaluable tips and techniques for a range of software, and encourages aspiring artists to get their work in print and receive international exposure."
Jonny Duddle, freelance artist

LIVE IN THE US/CANADA? TURN TO PAGE 78

Artist Q&A

GOT A QUESTION FOR OUR EXPERTS? LET US
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The ImagineFX panel
FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART

Mélanie Delon
Mélanie is a freelance fantasy illustrator. She works as a cover artist for several publishing houses, and on her personal artbook series.
www.melaniedelon.com

Lauren K Cannon
Lauren is a freelance fantasy artist who specialises in the surreal. She lives in a small woodland village in New Jersey, US.
www.navate.com

Cynthia Sheppard
Cynthia is a freelance digital artist. With a background in traditional painting, she likes to bring classical techniques to her work on digital canvas.
www.sheppard-arts.com

Dave Allsop
UK-based Dave is a fantasy illustrator for Wizards of the Coast, Nightfall Games and White Wolf among others. He also works in video games.
www.daveallsop.info

Brynn Metheney
Brynn was raised in the Mojave desert and moved to the Bay Area in 2006. Creature and animal illustrations are her forte.
www.brynnart.com

Remko Troost
Born in Amsterdam, Remko is a senior concept artist and illustrator with several years' experience in the film and video game industries.
www.remkotroost.com

Jonathan Standing
Jonathan is an English artist and illustrator. He's based near Toronto, Canada, and works for a developer in the video games industry.
www.jonathanstanding.com

Question
How do I paint a sense of elegant but wriggly movement into a giant fish?
Jenny Ho, Singapore

Using basic shapes can help capture movement, but also consider the environment and situation to reinforce the reason for movement.

Answer
Brynn replies

When drawing and painting creatures, it's always a good idea to gather reference material. Watching nature documentaries, looking at photos and visiting aquariums can all give you insights into how these animals move.

With fish, you have a fairly simple shape to work with. They typically move their bodies from side to side in an S-pattern to propel themselves forward. Starting with a gesture drawing that begins with this shape will aid in giving you a dynamic and energetic pose. From there, you can begin to build up your drawing, adding fins, a face and perhaps gills. Eventually, you can move on to your painting. Adding elements such as long, flowing pectoral fins and bubbles will add to the elegance you might be after. This will also help to emphasise the movement of the creature.

You should also think about the setting and background – this will affect the impression of movement in your fish, too. Keeping the horizon line slanted (here, by painting the water with a slanted angle to it) will help in giving the viewer a sense of movement. I've painted in prey animals to add some action to the pose, and to give the creature a motive for moving so violently.

Step-by-step:
How to make your fish move
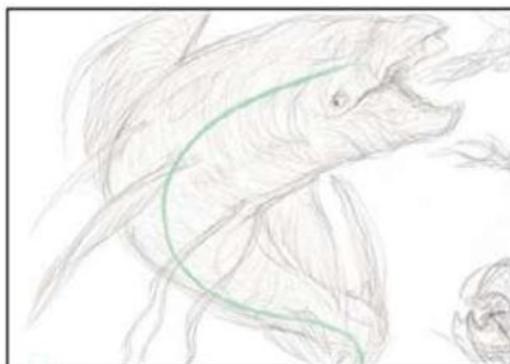
1 Here, you can see the S-shape that the fish's body creates as it moves and immediately recognise the creature as an active sketch. No matter how much rendering you do, always ensure that the basic shape carries through.

2 Once the basic shape is defined, I add detail. I've counteracted the movement of the whole fish by giving it long pectoral and dorsal fins. These fins help to suggest movement that might have happened seconds before.

3 Now I turn my attention to the background and atmospherics. Creating a reason for movement is important, and you can see that adding a few specks and bubbles adds depth.

Question
How do I make a monster's foot look ugly and grim?
Daryl Johnston, Australia

Here, I've drawn a basic human foot. I've chosen a woman's foot to provide a sharp contrast to the monstrous foot in the next image.

The skin here is tougher, and the overall foot is more chiselled and muscular. The toes are gnarled, and the nails are sharp and pointed.

Answer
Dave replies

I've found that the best way to draw and paint the feet of creatures such as orcs, trolls and giants is to make them look a bit like hands. The feet are longer than usual and the toes look quite similar to arthritic fingers – bent out of shape and a bit thin, with thick knuckles!

If the feet are appearing bare in your painting, it's likely that the creature never wears boots, and so the feet are certain to be very rough and calloused. They'll be stained and scarred from tramping around on tough, jagged surfaces. You could also paint on deep grimy stains and clog them up with dirt and muck.

Naturally, a monster isn't going to spend much time taking care of its feet, so the toenails will be thick and overgrown – they should be ragged and uneven. If it's a particularly animalistic creature, you might want to give it actual talons, like those you might find on a wolf or a bear.

Of course, the finishing touch is adding patchy clumps of coarse hair. You could render this with broad, wiry strands, spread out across the foot, or cover the entire foot with a shaggy pelt.

Question
How do I paint owls that don't look like stumpy birds?
Kerry Mathews, England

Answer
Lauren replies

Owl species are pretty diverse and some are stumpier than others, but they definitely tend towards the stout side when compared to other birds of prey. Just about every species is broader and seems to have a thicker, shorter neck than other birds, making them look very stiff and blocky. Sometimes this can work in the artist's favour if they're aiming for a comical or graphic look. But for realism artists, or people who want to give their owls some grace and movement, they can be a challenge to portray.

There are two things to focus on. One is the underlying form of the owl – easily forgotten under all those feathers. But owls, like all birds, have a head, neck, body, wings and legs. I think people often rely on the silhouette of a bird when they draw them, and forget about what's underneath. If you have trouble painting an owl, start with those basics, instead of the outline. Sketch out the body, just like you would for a human figure, to help place all the body parts correctly. This will help tackle the second issue: the contour or silhouette of the owl. Because owls are blockier than other birds, defining the subtleties of the contour will be important in giving the owl a more accurate and complex sense of form. You can convey a lot of detail with even simple shading if you handle a silhouette correctly.

Owls are challenging birds to paint because it's easy to lose track of the form beneath. There are subtle ways to help push the form to look less stumpy.

Sketch lines can help in visualising a form. See how the head, body, wings and legs relate to each other.

Question
How do I make objects look like they're made of different materials?
Sarah Williams, US

The metallic surface of the blunderbuss is distinct from the fabric, thanks to harder-edged highlights and shadows.

Answer
Jonathan replies

In a painting, the treatment of light and how it affects different materials is a great way to quickly distinguish between objects and their different qualities. The most obvious examples of this technique are to think of a coarse, dry material such as canvas sackcloth. If you contrasted that material with a sheet of plastic you could expect to see a diffused distribution of light on the former and, if the plastic had a hard surface, a specular highlight on the latter. A surface's translucency is also important. If you want to convey the idea that a material is very thin, then an instantly
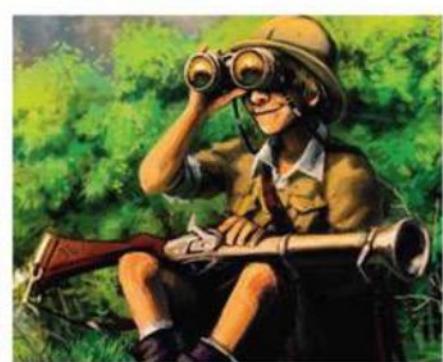
The lenses have a high degree of contrast and hard edges between light and dark. This makes them the most reflective material in the image.

recognisable indicator is to have light passing through it, as well as being reflected by it. Even subtle differences – the textures of two different types of fabric, say – can be described to the viewer by having highlights on each surface behave differently.

Question
How do I paint a dress that's layered, light, plump and frilly? *Tania Marshall, Australia*

Answer
Cynthia replies

More than anything, the edges of a dress define the look of light, layered fabric. The trick is to concentrate on fine details around the hard edges, letting the viewer's eye fill in the blanks.

Once you've established the shapes and edges of the dress, the trick is making the sheer part look transparent. When the dress is finished, draw the contours of the thin fabric on top as solid thin lines, adding a medium-opacity wash of colour over top. Then blend the edges of the translucent fabric into the dress underneath, leaving most of the painted dress below showing through.

Question
Are there any ways to revamp an old painting of a dragon?
Marlon Darrow, Australia

Answer
Dave replies

I think adding new features to a character or creature can help revamp an old painting. Whiskers, for example, can help to age a dragon painting of mine. The key is to avoid making the whiskers look too much like hair, though, because strands of hair are more common to mammals. The whiskers shouldn't be wispy and delicate – we're painting an ancient dragon here. Anything growing out of its head should be rigid.

On a creature of this size and power I'd make the whiskers a bit more like quills. They're thicker and tougher, and look more like an extension of the dragon's scales. Depending on the colour of your dragon, you may want to render the whisker in a similar colour tint. Of course, if you want to make the dragon especially old, the whiskers could be white or grey.

When painting on the facial 'hair', I wouldn't just confine the whiskers to the chin or muzzle. I'll add in smaller, thinner quills along its armoured brow, and even as far as the back of the jaw line. The whiskers also shouldn't look too orderly and neat. The aim is to make the dragon look old and haggard, but not feeble and senile.

Artist's secret
DEVELOPING AN OLD IMAGE

I take my original art and, using the Eyedropper tool, I can select the existing colour palette from the dragon art and paint in the whiskers that'll match the rest of the ancient dragon look even older, and somewhat wiser.

The green dragon looks suitably aged, but right now it looks a little plain and uninteresting. It shouldn't take much to add a new dimension to the painting.

Step-by-step: Painting a huge fluffy dress

1 I begin with a base colour and cover the whole shape. Then I add stripes of shadow in a slightly darker colour to make fabric folds. With a tiny brush I rough in the contours of the overskirt with long flowing strokes.

2 From the lines I've drawn to represent the outline of the translucent overskirt, I blend just inside the edges, into the dress underneath. With a colour slightly darker than my dress fabric, I add shadow beneath the hard edges of the overskirt.

3 For lace, I create a cloverleaf-shaped border, picking up colours from the dress, and I give it a few choice shadows. Around the bodice I add ribbon segments using a single stroke of the middle tone/ average dress colour with a thick brush.

Question

How do I paint hands that look dexterous and delicate?

Leah Sutton, England

Answer
Mélanie replies

Hands are possibly the most difficult part of the human body to paint. In this case we need to make them delicate and dexterous, and so there are several points to work on if you want to have the perfect render.

The first thing is the position; they must be aerial, like a dancer's hand, so I won't be painting a contracted hand like a fist for example. It's better to give a slight curve to them. In my painting I go for a delicate pose, as if the hand is floating in the air. The fingers must look relaxed.

The shape and thickness of the fingers are another important point: they mustn't look skinny, with bones showing through. It's better to paint them with soft curves instead of sharp edges – the joints must be slightly visible and the hand thin. The light and colours can also help. I select non-aggressive colours for my painting, but use tender tones and make the light and shadows very soft.

I always work these kind of delicate hands with brushes set to a very low hardness. The general look of the hand must be soft; wild brushstrokes could ruin the effect.
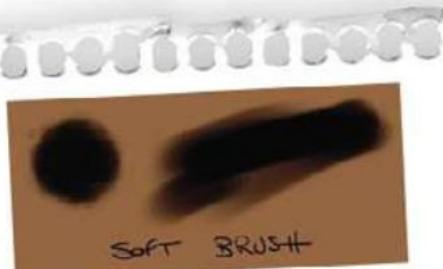
SOFT BRUSH

Artist's secret

ACHIEVING SOFT BRUSHSTROKES
When I need to have some soft edges I work them with this brush, which is on the DVD. It's a custom one that's perfect for working shadows and light. You can also use the Blur tool to soften the angles.

Step-by-step: Using soft brushes to paint delicate hands

1 I start my illustration by constructing the base. It's an important step because this is where I determine the general pose of the hand and position of the fingers. For extra realism I take a few photos of my own hand to get the pose just right. Each finger follows a soft curve because I don't want any hard edges.

2 Once the base is finished, I start to refine the hands. I focus on the thinness of fingers and palm, reducing their dimensions if necessary. I decide to make the fingers long, because short fingers often don't look very dexterous. In this case I prefer to paint them a bit too long – call it artistic license in action.

3 The shape of the hands must be soft, in particular the finger joints. I keep the light and shadows very soft, limiting detail. The blending needs to be perfect and so I use a custom brush with very soft edges. In contrast, the outlines of the hands need to be well defined, or else the fingers will look flat and weak.

4 I'm almost there now. All that's left to do is define the thumb and add some details on the fingers. I concentrate on the nails and add some dots of light here and there. This little touch brings extra lightness to the extremities of the fingers, without having to resort to glittery nail polish!

Question
Do you have any tips on painting colourful coral?
Warren Jacobs, New Zealand

Answer
Lauren replies

Coral is like the trees and foliage of the ocean: it's a subject an artist can take a huge amount of design and stylistic freedom with to suit their needs. Even real coral comes in a seemingly infinite variety of colours, shapes and textures. You can take advantage of how organic it is and manipulate it whatever way you want. As always I'll recommend looking up references, but in the case of coral it's mostly just for

Before you start texturing and defining the coral, block in the colours and basic shading. This will make refining the coral much easier.

inspiration. Coral is definitely a subject to run wild with.

As for the process of painting it, whether you're depicting just a few pieces of coral or a whole scene, start simple. Block in your basic colours first, just to make sure the coral works within the palette of the rest of the image. Then do some really basic shading to add some form and depth. Remember that underwater objects tend to have a lot of blues and greens in the shadows – it'll push the ocean feel and also give a lot of depth to the scene.

Once you have the coral in the image planned out, proceed with texturing and detailing. You can make it as simple or as complex as you like. If you're after a craggy, textural look I recommend using a natural media program like Painter; it's my go-to program for painting organic objects. If you don't have access to Painter, hunt down brushes that simulate dry media, such as pastels and chalk, for a similar look.

Coral comes in a huge variety of shapes, colours and textures. You can invest a lot of artistic licence and still make it believable.
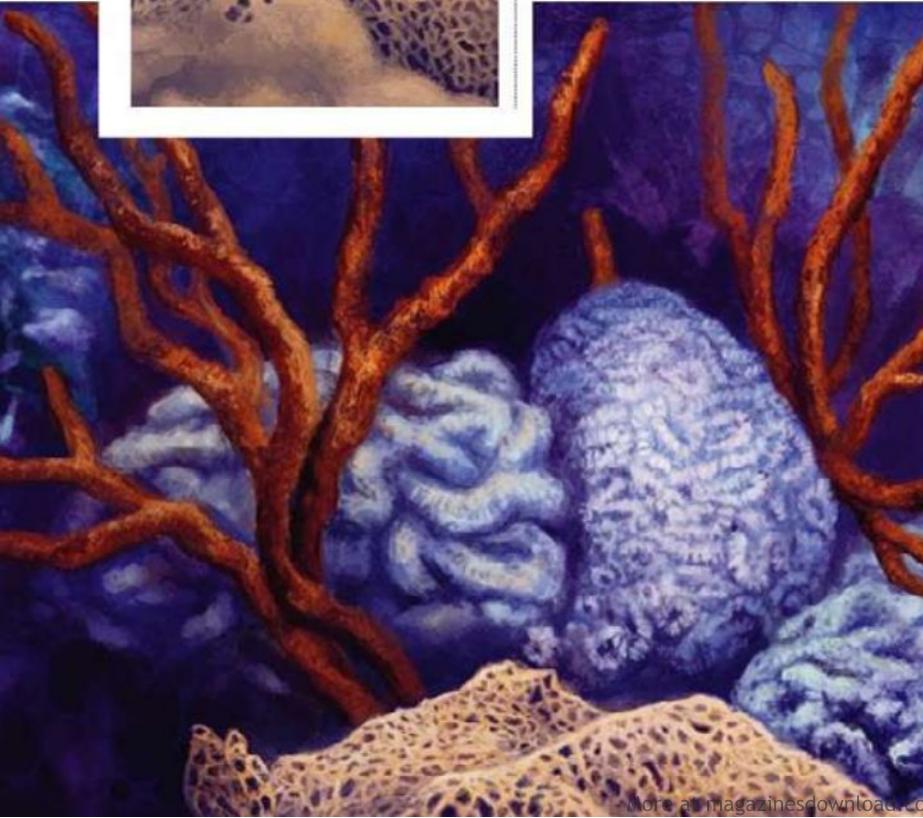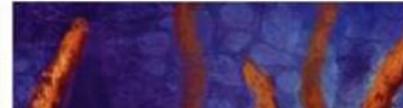
Question
How do I draw realistic ears?
Mark Crossbie, Canada

Answer
Cynthia replies

I approach drawing ears the same way I draw rippling fabric. Starting with the basic outlined form of the creases I add value between them, based on where the highest and lowest points are. Ears are just a network of interconnecting folds that start from a rounded outer shape and then curl inward towards the ear canal. I start with the outer edge of the ear, then define the folds in the inner ear with lines – there's a bump in front of the ear canal (the tragus), that extends from the cheek. Above the tragus there are two folds fading into and out of the ear, respectively. Finally, the curl around the top of the ear follows

Here's my drawing of an ear from the side, which shows the outline of the folds and where to shade under top-down lighting conditions.

the outline and diminishes into the lobe with a fading crease. Highlight the lobe and tops of the folds. Your darkest shadows will be behind the lobe, beneath the outside rim of the ear and in the ear canal itself.

Question
What advice do you have for improving my digital line work?
Ross Cohen, US

Answer
Remko replies

As much as possible, I tweak my tools, so that they feel like traditional tools. For straight, clean outlines, I use a basic Round brush, set to 100 per cent opacity, so I can use the pressure to control the thickness of my lines.

I often do a pencil sketch on paper, then scan it, to put it below the layer that will contain my line work. Next I use a basic Round brush, with Pen Pressure and Texture selected, to give the lines a traditional, pencil feel.

For clean, straight lines you might want to use either the Pen or Lasso tool. I create a selection then go to Edition>Stroke, where a little window enables you to customise

For this character I began by painting in some values, before doing the outlines. This helps me to better understand the forms that I'll wrap my strokes around.

further. I save it in my Actions (Scripts) and assign it a shortcut.

Don't forget to play around with the Space, Dynamics, Flow and Pen Pressure of your brush, to create a flow that best suits your style.

Question
What are the key ingredients for painting a relaxed expression?
Helena Marr, Ireland

Answer
Mélanie replies

The first thing to do here is to try to imagine what the character feels (this works for all expressions). A relaxed, calm look doesn't mean that the character feels nothing – on the contrary, she or he could be thinking about many things, so I must keep this point in mind as I paint. I start by studying the expression I want in front of a mirror. It's almost like acting, and it's really helpful to see which of the face's features I have to play with in my portrait.

To get the expression right, the face's features need to look at peace and not contracted, so I try to avoid sharp edges. I tend to soften everything to increase the relaxed feeling of my portrait's expression.

The eyebrows are probably the best way to add expression to a face. You can use eyebrows to show if the character is sad, happy or surprised, simply by changing their angle. To paint a relaxed expression, I position the eyebrows naturally – not straight, because this could give the character too strong a look. The shape must be softly curved, avoiding any hard edges.

The mouth is also a key element. I'm not painting a blank expression, so I include a slight smile on my portrait. This helps to instruct the viewer about the character's feelings. A mouth that's slightly open will look more natural and relaxed than a closed one, which could give a worried or overly serious look to the face.

After correcting the mouth and the eyebrows, the character now looks more natural and calm. You can quickly modify facial features with the Liquify tool in Photoshop.

Question
Any tips on painting curled, complex animal horns?
Laurent Tautou, France

My final painting, complete with curly, complex horns, wasn't too difficult after plenty of research and planning.

Answer
Brynn replies

Reference, reference, reference! Nothing beats looking at horns in books, online, in zoos and museums. Getting access to a set of horns to study from different angles is worth it, too. It's always a good idea to draw the actual thing first, before making it your own design. Every good painting starts with a solid drawing, so begin with a rough sketch, then take it to a planar view. This simplified wire-frame line drawing will help you to decide in which direction your horns will curl, and even how you need to light them. It will be something you can refer back to as you paint, so keep this sketch above all of your other layers, until you get to the point when you don't need it anymore.

My planar view sketch helped me figure out where the spine of the horns were, and aided with structure.

Next month
ON SALE: **5 April**
Paint dappled sunlight
in a woodland glade

Question
How would you draw bright, glorious sunshine during a rainstorm?
Jason Connor, US

Answer
Remko replies

Well, rain and sun are two contrasting things, and each has a proper behaviour and colour palette. I try to mix the palettes up in a way that still looks natural. Although sunlight brightens objects and increases the vibrancy of colours, rain often comes with a grey sky and gives the environment a really cold, desaturated feeling.

I start by painting in a dark sky with desaturated greens, purples and blues. Then I decide where the sun will come through, which in this case is quite low, at the height of the skyline.

Next, I use warm, light colours, such as orange and yellow, to break the cold tones of the rain.

I copy the sky onto a new layer and use a large, custom Speckled brush to paint spots and speckles all over the image in a very irregular way. I use a strong Motion Blur on these speckles to create my first layer of rain. I duplicate this layer a few times, before erasing some parts to create depth in my rain.

Now, using a basic Round brush, with Pen Pressure on, I paint in random raindrops, blurring them in the same direction as the rain with the Smudge tool. I also paint water dripping from the roof, and finally the raindrops that are touched directly by the sunlight, making them clearer so that it looks as though they're reflecting the light.

I put a layer on top of my main image, and with an orange colour I create a circular gradient at the place where the sun comes through. I create this layer in Overlay or Color Dodge mode and play with the opacity to obtain a nice effect of light breaking through the rain.

Finally, I paint the light that falls on the objects in my environment. After the rain comes the sunshine!

The sun only lights up parts of the scene, which can create really dramatic atmospheres in your paintings.

Artist's secret

PAINTING LIGHT

The Overlay and Color Dodge modes are great ways to quickly paint light and colour into monotone or strongly desaturated pictures. You can either put a layer set to Overlay mode above it all, or when working on only one layer, set your brush in different modes, using the Options menu just above the toolbar.

Step-by-step: How to paint sunlight breaking through rain

1 Using grey desaturated colours, I paint the cold, cloudy sky. At the point where the skyline breaks the horizon, I use warmer, lighter colours to create a sun that's slowly breaking through. This contrast is key to lighting the whole scene.

2 With a speckled custom brush, I paint in spots and speckles. I use a Motion Blur on these to give the dynamic feel of pouring rain. This is a nice, easy way to create rain quickly, giving the impression of movement in the downpour.

3 Depending on where the sun breaks through, I like to paint in reflections on some of the raindrops, using the same tones of light as I've used for my sun. This is a simple touch that can actually add a lot of depth to the scene.

The art of
JOEL CHANG

With a range of big projects coming out this year, **Joel Chang** tells us about his work on the film Sucker Punch and explains his creative process

ental asylums from the 1950s, gothic architecture, World War II weapons, robots, fantasy dragons and samurai. Sucker Punch is certainly poised to knock film-goers out with its flurry of genres and styles. So Joel Chang, a concept artist whose working process is infused with the idea of keeping variety in his images, seemed a natural fit on a picture that's so full of different aesthetic directions. "Sucker Punch was basically like working on everything I love all rolled up into one project," he says.

If Joel's portfolio were an ammo belt, Sucker Punch would slot in right alongside Transformers: Dark of the Moon. This third movie in the franchise that puts giant, Japanese-style robot vehicles at front and centre is another visual epic he recently finished working on. The style of the robots in the film had already been determined when he came onto the project, but he still ranks Transformers 3 as one of the key projects he's worked on. The TV series was his favourite cartoon when he was growing up.

However, the reason he enjoyed working on the film so much is that he feels it helped him grow as an artist. "I was forced to work outside my comfort zone and got to learn 3D in the process," he says. In the past I wasn't really able to utilise 3D in my work because I had trouble blending 3D-rendered images into my pieces."

Soon, another 2011 film will be added to his resume. He's just finished creating artwork for War Horse, directed by Steven Spielberg, which comes out later this year.

HIGH IMPACT
Joel's concepts for Sucker Punch took into account not just the range of visual elements that the film draws together, but its impact and action.

"You throw your ideas out there in the form of sketches and images…"

As we go to press, he's at Universal, generating concept art for Snow White and the Huntsman, a new live-action adaptation based on the classic Brothers Grimm fairy tale. Past projects have included a range of computer games including the futuristic online game Tabula Rasa, another based on Spider-Man 3, as well as Resident Evil 5.

"I think an artist can greatly influence the final look and feel of the project, but it depends on what the scope of the project is, at what point you enter the project and what the client needs. Sometimes the client is really looking for ideas and other times they may already know exactly what they want," he says.

What Joel loves is when scenes he's created come through and can be enjoyed by movie-goers or game players. "You throw your ideas out there in the form of sketches and images, and then you adjust and refine based on feedback from the art director or production designer," he says. "I put a lot of heart into my work, so it's a ➤➤

ARTIST TIP

INSPIRATION

"There is a lot of great work being done in graphic design, fashion, motion graphics, product design and architecture, and they are great avenues to help nurture your creativity and motivate you as an artist. I believe it's good not to let yourself be pigeon-holed into only one discipline or industry, but to draw inspiration from all of them."

MECH INSECT
Personal work featuring Joel's carapaced, cockroach-style mechs in a chaotic desert race.
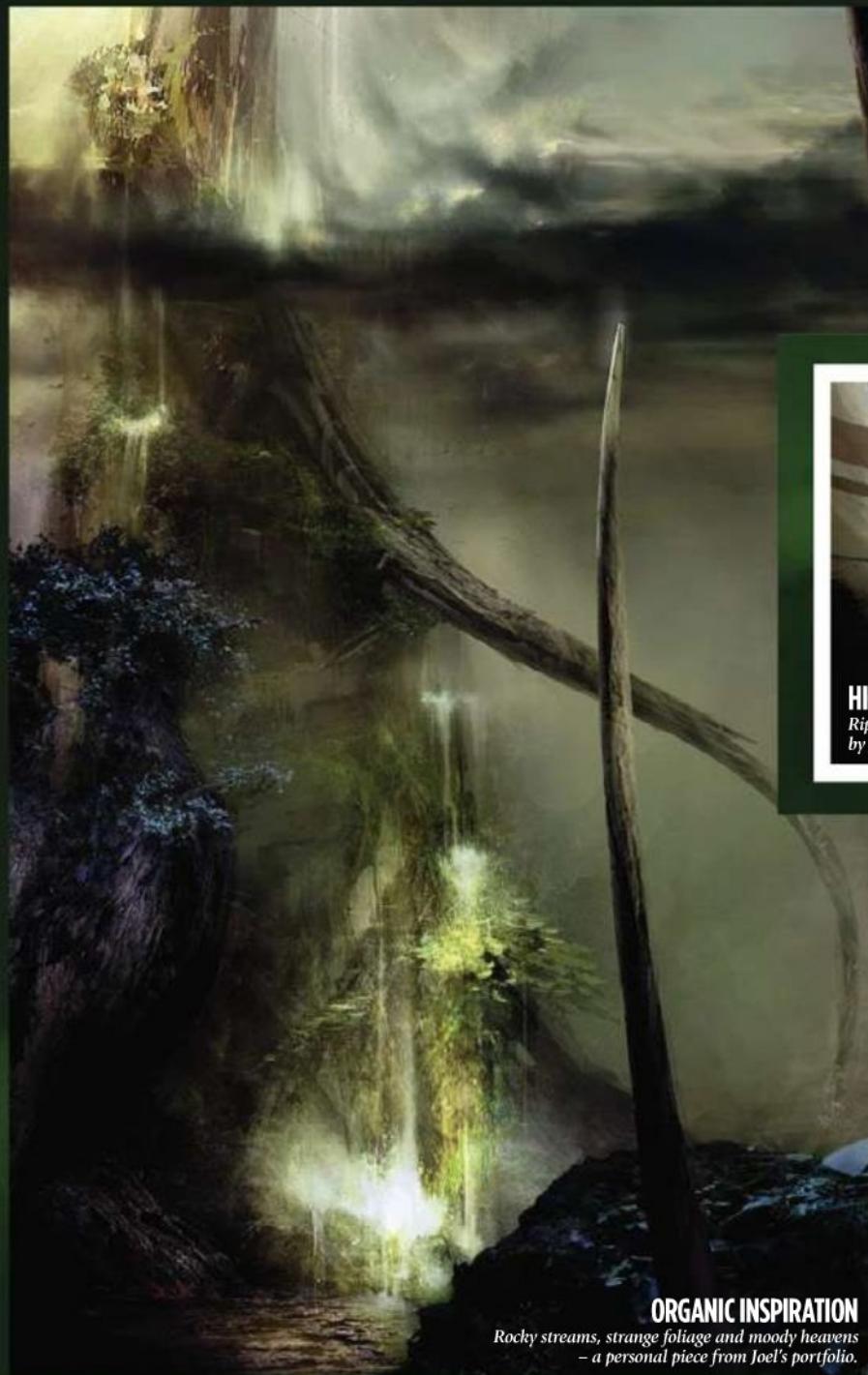
ORGANIC INSPIRATION
Rocky streams, strange foliage and moody heavens – a personal piece from Joel's portfolio.

➤➤ great feeling when I actually get to see it brought to life in the finished product!"

STUDIO BENEFITS

Joel has been a freelance concept artist since graduating from the Art Centre College of Art and Design in Pasadena, California in 2004. He loves the pace of the freelance life, and the way it requires adapting to new projects quickly and hitting the ground running no matter what kind of project is being visualised. At first, he really enjoyed working from home and he thinks he was more productive there. However, his experience of going into studios has changed his mind.

"Working on-site is where I actually learn the most and grow as an artist," he explains. "I think being around other artists has been so important because it helps me see what I'm lacking and pushed me to get better. I don't know where I would be if I had never met all the talented and great people I've met over the years."

When it comes to his inspiration, he includes as favourites Tadao Ando, ➤➤

HIGH SEAS HIGH JINKS
Rip-roaring action and stormy waters – concepted by Joel for the upcoming film Arabian Nights.

Joel Chang
VITAL STATISTICS
"Put a spin on a piece, but make it believable"

Date of Birth
13 February 1979.
Place of Birth
East Lansing, Michigan.
Current location
Los Angeles, CA.
Favourite music
Sigur Rós, Arcade Fire, Beirut, The xx and Mew.
Average time per image
One to two days.
Coolest movie hero?
Nacho, because he cares for the orphans.
What's your favourite time of the year?
Fall.
If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I would love to live in a house designed by myself, surrounded by a field of tall grass.
**Web address**
www.joelchang.com

AIRBORNE MÊLÉE

Sucker Punch combines gothic buildings, WWII aircraft and weapons, imaginary monsters, robots, futuristic vehicles and a touch of oriental styling.

ARCHITECTURE..

Joel worked on environments for Sucker Punch with the Aaron Sims Company, one of Hollywood's leading concept art studios.

SUCKER PUNCH

Joel designed some of the awesomely bleak scenery for this fantasy action thriller from the director of 300 and Watchmen

Pulling together and juxtaposing so many genres, styles and historic eras, the artists working on Sucker Punch really needed latitude. Starting off in a 1950s mental institution, it then begins again in an imagined realm featuring everything from manga-esque samurai to World War II weaponry. The artists needed to blend the various connotations of the imagery, without it jarring with the viewer.

To be a part of this project, Joel went to work as environment designer with the Aaron Sims Company in Hollywood. "It was probably one of my favourite projects to work on," says Joel. "The creative process was great. They were so open to everything and to seeing whatever unique concepts everyone could come up with – within reason. They gave us almost free range to use our creativity to its fullest and that's what made it so much fun. It might be the closest to free associating that I may get to do for a long time."

...ATMOSPHERE AND ACTION

Working with photographic textures and brushes in Photoshop, Joel created epic scenes during the development of the film Sucker Punch.

Hugh Ferriss, Craig Mullins and John Singer Sargent. But another artist is top of the list. "I would have to say Ryan Church influenced me the most while I was in school. I was so amazed at how he was able to describe the motion and movement of a scene while clearly communicating the design of everything."

In the same way that all the pictures Joel works on each require a different look, he

I think about what twist I can add to a piece to make it more interesting, yet still keeping it believable

likes to introduce a lot of variety in his approach to creating the artwork in the first place. "I think about what spin or twist I can add to a piece to make it more interesting, yet still keeping it believable."

To keep things varied in his imagery, he works with reference material in an interesting way. Whenever he sees something that interests him, it goes into a folder on his hard disk. He never sorts the images, just keeps them in there loose.

Later, when he wants to find interesting design elements to bring into a picture, he starts going through what he's thrown into the folder. Resources might include landscapes, pottery, graphs, topographical maps, furniture – anything he's dumped there for future reference.

His working process isn't as methodical as it could be, he admits, but he sees every new job as a chance to grow. "With every project, I concentrate on some technique I would like to improve, alongside creating a piece that will be useful."

Usually, he starts in Photoshop and blocks out big shapes, forming the composition and giving it a sense of gesture. He tries hard not to get caught up in detail. Sometimes his process incorporates a little 3D work in Maya. He finds this useful when a scene is complicated, and he can use it to view

things from different angles. Consequently, the 3D features in Photoshop are a welcome inclusion in the application, enabling him to import 3D objects.

He continues: "I don't want to become too attached to an image yet, especially not at this point. This is something I find myself doing often, so I try to pay extra attention to it."

As the image develops, he wants to keep looking at it with new eyes as the lighting, colour and detail go in. To help do this, he flips it horizontally, to get a different perspective. "The rest of the process is just working with the shapes, pushing and pulling them to create depth and then breaking those shapes down to create detail," he adds.

WHAT'S DONE IS DONE

For many fantasy artists, knowing the right time to put the brush or stylus down is one of the biggest challenges. In the world of concept art, Joel points out, you really can't intellectualise about when an image is 'done'. "I usually know when a piece is done because I get an email asking

FUTURISTIC
In addition to vast environments, Joel likes to experiment with futuristic vehicles in his personal work.
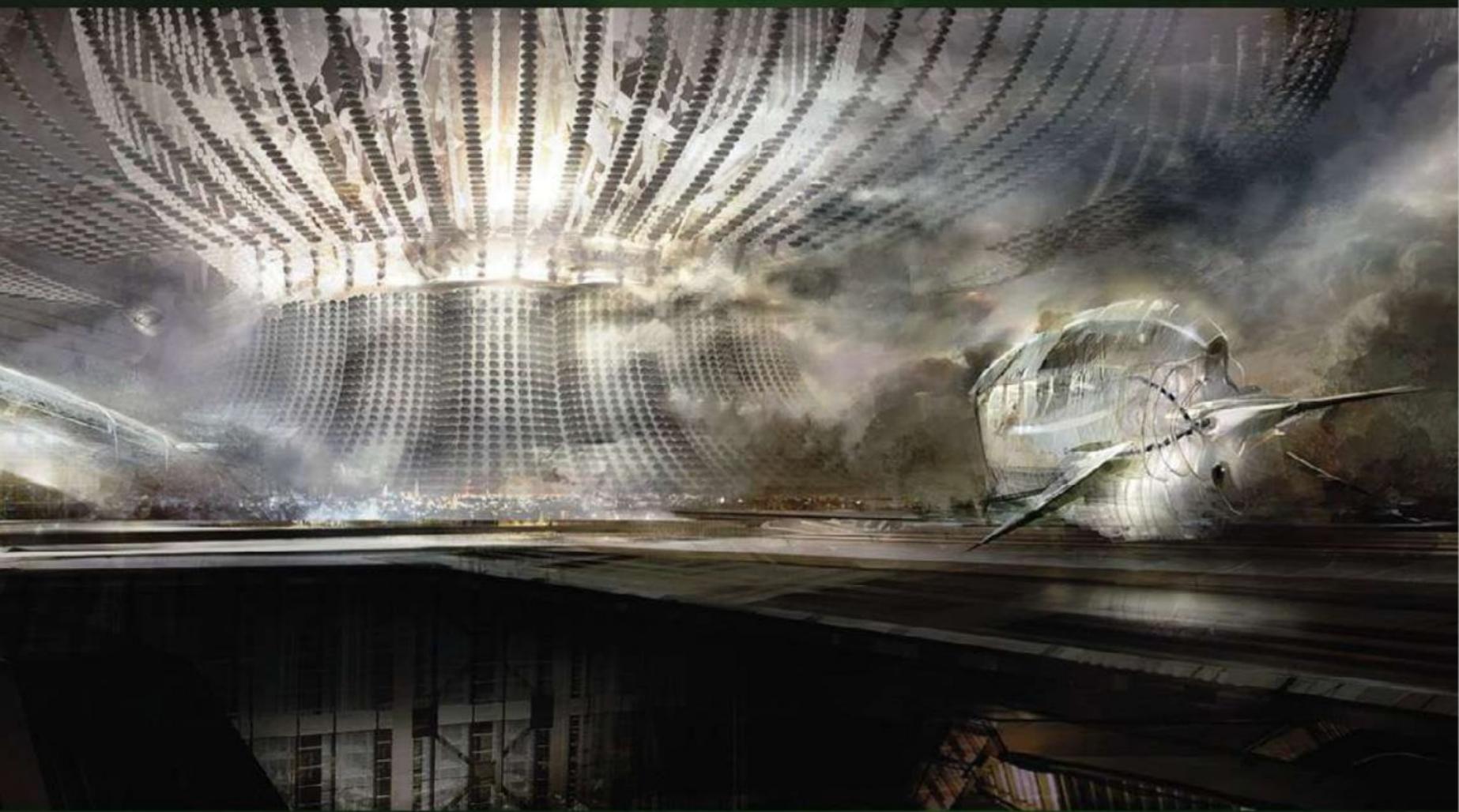
for it. The client could need the image anytime, whether you're done with it or not, so I usually try to make sure that everything is represented in the early or mid stages," he says.

With his current slew of high profile projects coming out this year and next, Joel seems very settled as a concept artist. He doesn't really feel the urge some others seem to experience, wanting to create artwork that's used directly in projects like books and comics. As he puts it: "There's still so much for me to learn and grow right now as a concept artist so I see myself doing this for a while." ●

HAUNTED
One of Joel's skills is to convey the emotion of a scene, using quickly rendered detail and texture. This is a personal piece in Photoshop.

AN EPIC FUTURE
Working on the massively multiplayer online game Tabula Rasa, Joel gave up the solitary freelance life to work in NCsoft's studio.

OTHERWORLDLY
Concept art for Tabula Rasa. "I was always drawn to things that put you in another world and made you feel that there was something more out there," says Joel.

CONCEPTS FOR VIDEO GAMES

Working on the game Tabula Rasa was a crucial highlight in Joel's career...

It was while he was at NCsoft that Joel saw the benefits of going into a studio rather than working remotely. "This was the first time I saw what happened to my images after they were finished. It helped me adjust how I worked so that the pieces were more useful at the next stage.

"I've found that in both industries [games and films], it just varies depending on the project, the people you're working with and what they need from you. Sometimes they may just need a general idea for the overall look. Other times, they may need very tight images where you have to design every nut and bolt."

Development sheet

PROJECT TITLE: POWERED ARMOUR

Chris Drysdale challenged himself to design a mech with the impression of menacing bulk, poised insect-like upon strong, thin mechanical limbs

Artist PROFILE

Chris Drysdale

Canada-based Chris is a freelance concept designer in the film and video games industries. His past clients include Double Helix, Novalogic and Left Field Productions, for which he created concept art, logo designs and storyboards. His matte work and concepts have been used in a sci-fi community film project.
www.chrisdrysdale.com

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX

Ideate I keep sketchbooks filled with cryptic sketches that record impressions of concepts rather than complete drawings. I scan a number of these thumbnails and add basic tones in Photoshop to make them easier to evaluate.
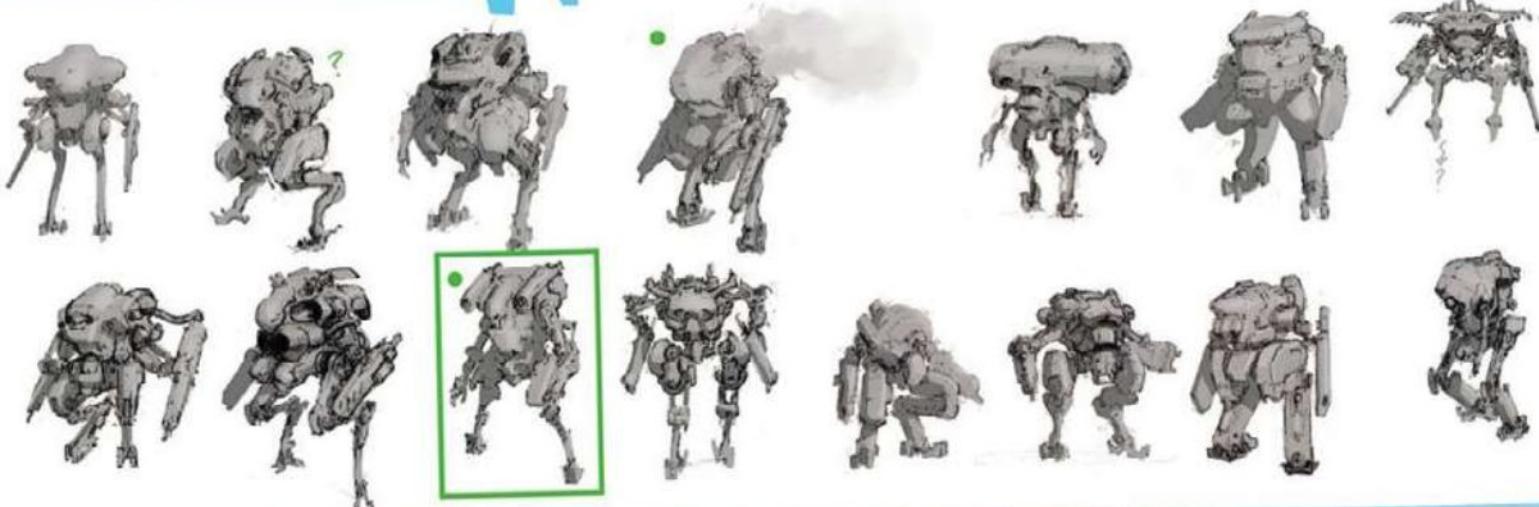
Add detail I choose a thumbnail that embodies the qualities I'm looking for, and enlarge the chosen silhouette. I start refining the design and mechanical features in a line drawing that's kept deliberately loose.
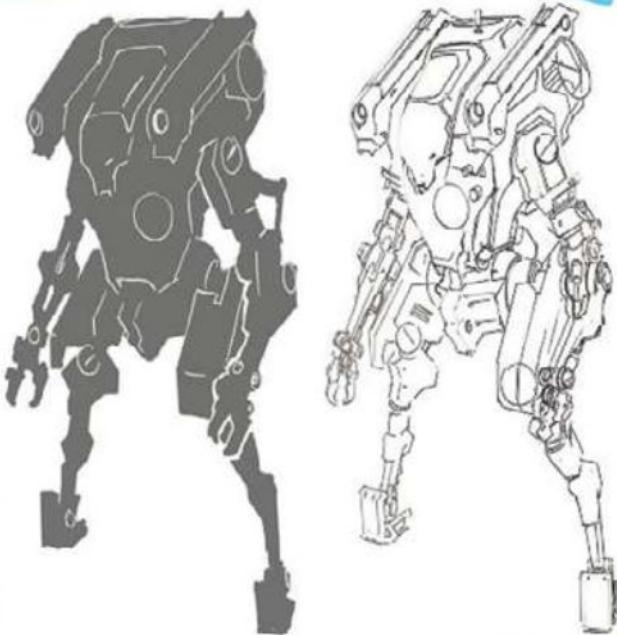
Create variations I experiment with colour and tone in a search for a look that's consistent with my original goals. I create a red version with a translucent faceplate, but conclude that darker colouration and a lack of human features is more menacing.
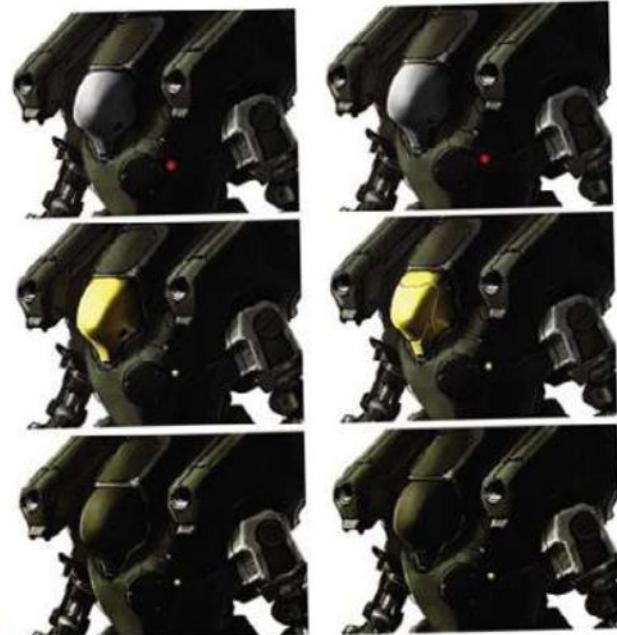
Add texture I use a combination of photo overlays and hand-painting with custom grunge brushes to suggest wear and tear. The photos are either my own, or sourced from royalty-free sites such as **www.cgtextures.com**.

Seek critique After showing the sketch to some fellow artists, they kindly point out perspective and design issues. I do my best to correct the most obvious gaffes. This sketch is just a first step; it'll guide me as I pursue fully realised designs that share the same overall look.

SEND US YOUR CONCEPTS!

Are you working on a project, or doodling your own development sketches that you'd like to share with us?

LET US KNOW! Email your WIPs and final images to: **develop@imaginefx.com**

Sketchbook

Anthony Ermio

Touching personal moments and aliens on the subway, Anthony's sketchbook is a unique mix of observations

Artist PROFILE

Anthony Ermio

Anthony studied illustration and animation at San José State University. Since 2005, he's worked as a concept artist at Electronic Arts Redwood Shores and Factor 5, and he recently started at Lucasfilm Animation. Outside work, he spends time with his wife and two daughters, and tries to record things in his sketchbook as often as he can.

anthonyermio.blogspot.com

STRANGULATION

"This was done at a meeting at a previous workplace. I tend to tune out when it comes to numbers and motivational threats to work longer hours. The stress at work branched out into the rest of my life. I'm glad I left that company, because it was turning me into a mess."

OUT-AND-ABOUT

"I'd been a homebody for a while and I wanted to get out and away. I painted this instead. A lot of the stuff I do digitally has to do with escapism – places I'd like to go. My sketchbook is more about what's in front of me."

BLEAK
"I was thinking about how screwed the environment is when I painted this. I've always loved the struggle in Russian realist painter Ilya Repin's work, and camels are dope. So there you go. Camels in the snow? Expect to see more of that in the future."

SIMONAH SLEEPING
"A drawing of my wife and daughter with some made-up stuff here and there, and directions to some place in Daly City, CA. I draw my family a lot, especially my kids when they're asleep. There's no real significance to this page – I just like the way it looks."

"My sketchbook is more about what's in front of me"
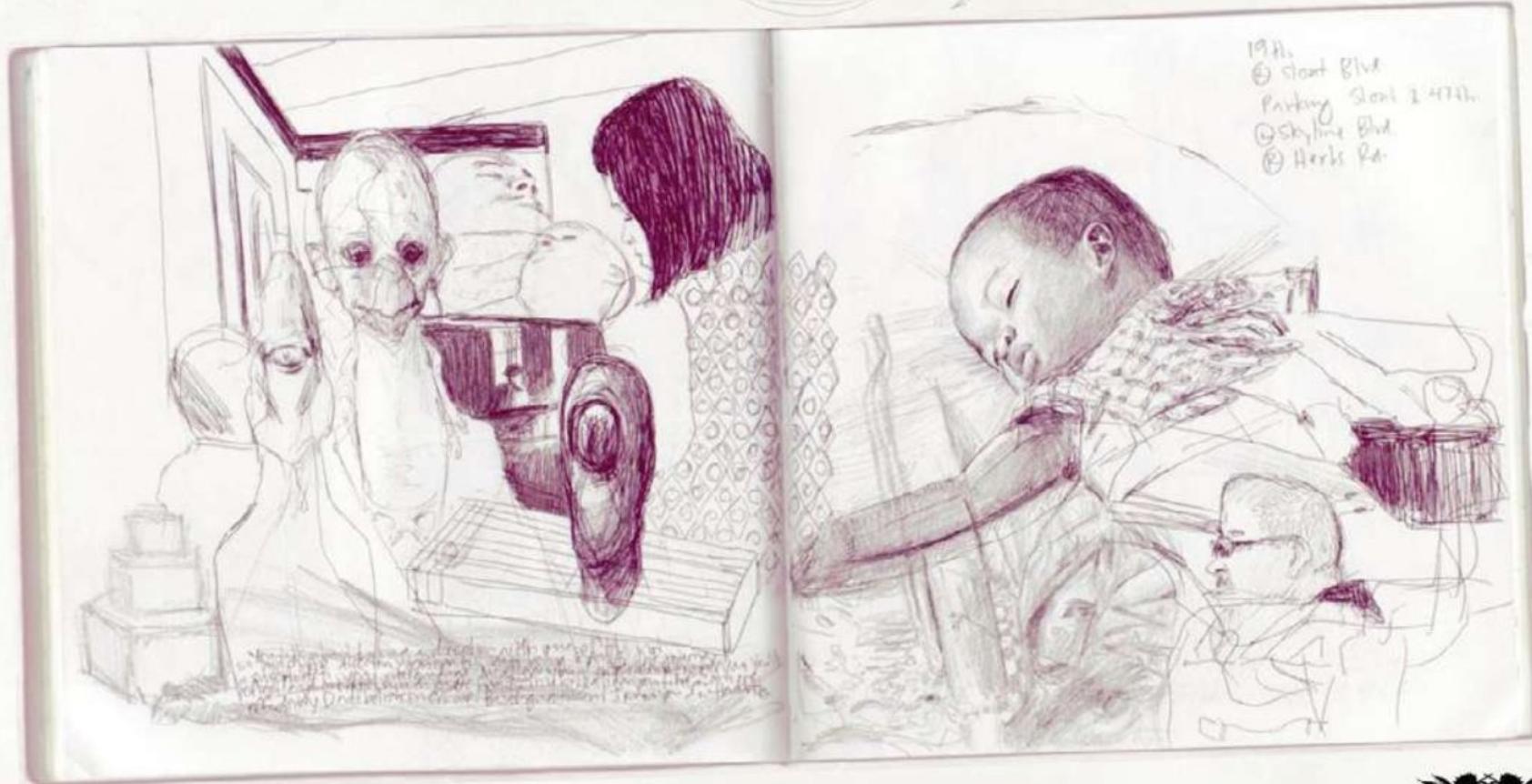
Sketchbook

THE 22

"The range of characters I come across when using public transport always makes for interesting rides. One time, a crackhead sat next to me and my girlfriend and blew smoke in our faces. Yum. This piece was a quick sketch imagining public transport in another world."

RED FACE

"This was a mish-mash of African tribesmen, samurais, European armour and some other stuff I can't remember. I was desperately trying to paint like Craig Mullins. Not even close."

AWKWARD

"Instead of taking notes at a company meeting, I drew my co-workers – it was a frustrating time for us all. My wife was added later. I used to be jealous of her because she was at home with the kids."

BLAO!

"I drew this at a Chinese restaurant while waiting for my takeaway order – I was brainstorming about a collaborative project (that never happened). I believe I was trying to figure out how to illustrate a song, or some lyrics, by my college roommate, Scarub."

"The characters I come across when using public transport makes for interesting rides"

BRUSH TEST

"This is just an old sketch testing out a brush I made in Photoshop. It's interesting how even though I'm scribbling on a tablet, a few textures and settings tell my brain that I'm swishing around paint on a canvas. It doesn't feel so convincing now, but back then it did."

JEROME BAKER

"I had Jel's track All Day Breakfast on repeat, which got me wondering what happened to my old college buddies. Our days consisted of getting baked and scratching. I sold my turntables (biggest mistake) to get out of debt. At least I concentrated in my art classes."

Part 4
Socket to 'em

Dual socket technology can put a supercomputer on your desk

When you're rendering 3D, crunching huge datasets or creating complex models, there's no such thing as too much power: the more powerful your workstation, the happier your working day becomes. That's why Dell created the Precision T5500 and T7500 workstations, everyday supercomputers that deliver the multi-core processing punch and sheer scalability you've been waiting for.

Turn it up to 12

With support for not one but two next-generation, multi-core processors, the Dell Precision T5500 and T7500 can deliver up to twelve cores of processing power for your most demanding applications. Factor in RAID storage options, dual-native PCIe x16 Gen 2 graphics slots and in the Precision T7500, enough room for an enormous 192GB of DDR3 RAM and you've got something truly astonishing.

Faster, more powerful and more efficient than ever before, the Precision T5500 was voted Best Workstation in InfoWorld's 2011 Technology of the Year Awards. "Demanding users who need the expansive capacity and roaring muscle of a high-end desktop should look no further," InfoWorld says.

Core strength

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MONKEY *Done for fun, Craig is playing with 1970s production design cues, such as costumes, props, lighting and characters.* Close ✕

CRAIG SELLARS

LOADING...

Mixing traditional and digital, period detail and science fiction styling, **Craig Sellars** has a unique view of the world...

Artist PROFILE

Craig Sellars

FAVOURITE ARTISTS:
Syd Mead,
Robert McGinnis,
Stanley Meltzoff,
Ralph McQuarrie

SOFTWARE USED:
Photoshop

AVERAGE TIME PER IMAGE:
Two days

WEB: www.greensocksart.com

I t's strange how you never notice the 10-foot tall whirring robot in the corner of the diner until someone points it out. This is the premise behind much of Craig Sellars' inspirational view of the world. Channelling the ghost of realist US artist Edward Hopper, through his love of pulp science fiction and 40s Americana, Craig makes the ordinary look extraordinary.

"I do like to combine elements and conventions in my personal work," states the former Disney layout artist when tasked with explaining his alternative, retro view of reality. "I find it interesting to take recognisable conventions or elements that are considered a bit cheesy or campy and give them a serious treatment, then, by placing them in a unique or slightly incongruous situation, hopefully we see them in a new light." In Craig's hands America's most iconic situations and locations take on new meaning, and we're happy to believe and buy into his visions because his style and technique reminds us of the masters.

A traditionally trained artist, Craig first studied industrial and graphic design, then classical animation at Sheridan College, before he took a job at Disney where, he says, his real education began. "Once I got to Disney, it was like going

HENRI 2.0 *This is a concept for the control facility for the ship containing the brain of the main character.* Close ✕

LIGHT CONTROL *Craig's experience at Disney taught him how to compose a scene using light to create a focal point and tell a story.* Close ⊠

to school all over again. Through the extensive study and analysis of painting and film from many eras and tonnes of plain old drawing, I learned to use composition, lighting and staging to tell a story visually," says Craig, explaining how Disney focuses on keeping things simple to sell the reality of a scene. He says that studying real locations, photos and movie scenes enables him to get a better understanding of the way to light his paintings, treating the art as a stage to cast his characters onto. "At Disney we learned to design the lighting around a simple two-three value plan that made compositions elegantly simple, yet very strong."

This background, combined with a love of John Singer Sargent ("I really love the way he used light in the staging of his paintings") and Coby Whitmore ("his economic way of painting created a very graphic style") has filtered through into

Craig's personal work. Using simple compositions designed around a scene's lighting, Craig paints snapshots of lazy, late-night diners that are reminiscent of the America that Hopper, and Norman Rockwell, would have depicted… if they'd loved tin-clad robots.

There's a warm nostalgia to Craig's images, but what's most impressive is how you're unsurprised by his twist; a tired office worker being harassed by a mechanical detective really doesn't feel out of place. "I find it challenging to blend and incorporate these things – and therein lies the fun," says Craig.

Surprisingly, Craig says he wasn't always enamoured with 1940s noir and Americana. Instead, like a lot of artists in the video game and film industries, he took inspiration from Star Wars. So why the love of dusky diners and pulp fiction now? "I think I tend to gravitate towards the ➤➤

ROBOT *The final design for the robot created to house the brain and consciousness of the main character in Henri 2.0.* Close ⊠

Gallery ➤

CRAIG SELLARS

PHONE BOOTH *This image was intended to evoke a cinematic feel through a simple interaction between characters.* Close ✕

BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE

Although he works digitally, Craig also likes to use a traditional approach to his paintings, to help keep them retro-looking

Craig says moving to digital art was an evolution of his process. "I found drawing with a tablet difficult and counter-intuitive, so I would often begin by doing the drawing traditionally, scanning it, then starting to paint in Photoshop. These days, my whole commercial work process is digital."

Although he works digitally in Photoshop, Craig maintains a traditional approach to his paintings. Beginning loosely with a sketch, he builds up value and colour by painting over details with varying degrees of transparency. Generally, Craig says he works on one layer, occasionally using photos and elements of photos selectively at low opacity to create texture.

"With brushes," says the artist, "it's really just a Smooth Round out of the default brush palette and maybe a few custom brushes that I've either made myself or collected along the way."
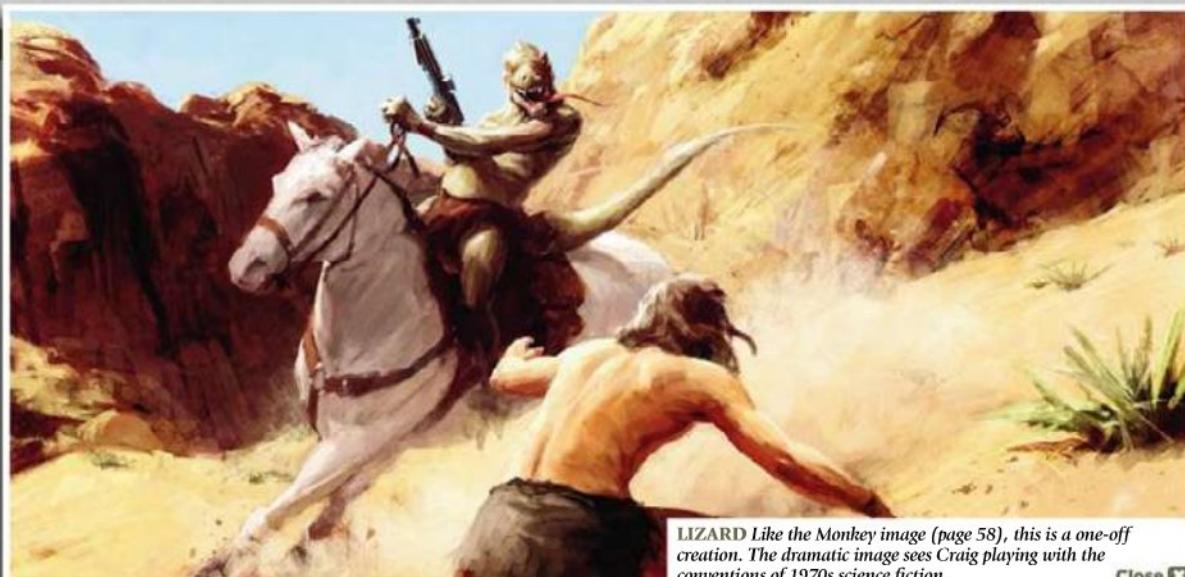
LIZARD *Like the Monkey image (page 58), this is a one-off creation. The dramatic image sees Craig playing with the conventions of 1970s science fiction.* Close ✕

💬 Comments

Ian Dean
ImagineFX
Craig has a wonderful cinematic touch that brings some quite odd scenarios to life with startling realism. I love his deft mix of pulp sci-fi and everyday life.

John Picacio
Pro artist
With paintings such as Phone Booth Craig's work doesn't just bring you into the moment – it wraps you in it. Craig has a brilliant sense of light and mood.

Casey Callender
ImagineFX reader
Craig's painting style, particularly with his digital work, combines a gritty, dynamic aesthetic with a strong sense of composition and storytelling. His technique is simply exquisite.

1940s pulp genre in my personal work because it's so different from the type of material I work on in my professional projects," says Craig. "I'm a big fan of strong simple visual design, which is so much a part of films from that era, particularly noir films, so I tend to be attracted to that genre."

Seeing as Craig is drawn to the evocative charm of pulp sci-fi, it's no surprise that his paintings feel traditional, even though they're created digitally. He uses many layers of transparent colour to achieve subtle transitions in value and hue, while his economic brushwork captures light and form, giving Craig's scenes a sense of realism. Craig learned to paint by studying traditional illustrators who used gouache, and so when he first took up digital art he continued in this vein, treating it as an opaque medium. The design cues may feel out of time, yet his simple but studied treatment ensures a robot in a diner is as commonplace as bacon and eggs.

Although they look authentic, Craig says he doesn't base his paintings on any particular location. "I do make a note and take some reference photos if I find myself in a particularly interesting location," he says. "In my personal work I tend to gravitate toward those mid-century locations, like diners, since they have so much history and iconic meaning, yet there are so few of them around now. I tend to be more interested in unique, slightly unusual situations that take place in recognisable and accessible locations, rather than simply the fantastic."

His current work as a freelance illustrator in the video games industry, working for EA and Digital Extremes, plays to Craig's strengths in creating dramatic, believable scenarios. Yet, to date, Craig hasn't truly been able to transfer his private passion to his day job. He is however getting close to achieving this goal.

A recent project, titled Henri 2.0, is "an independent film in the spirit of classic 70s sci-fi," says Craig. It looks to play

VILLAIN An early design of a villainous mastermind for a personal project. Close ✕

> **I'm interested in unique, slightly unusual situations that take place in recognisable and accessible locations**

on the artist's love of vintage scenes and character studies. Keeping busy, Craig is also working with a writer friend and other artists on a personal project that explores his ideas, while working on a period project or a highly stylised film noir is still a career aim. "I think any project with highly sophisticated visual design is interesting to work on," says the artist with one eye on past and one firmly set on the future. ●

Gallery

1

2

🇺🇸 Andy Kehoe
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.andykehoe.net
EMAIL: andy@andykehoe.net
MEDIA: Acrylic and oil on wood panel

Andy was born in Pittsburgh, PA and now paints in a dusty attic in Portland, OR. "I share my studio with another artist and two squirrels," he says. "The squirrels constantly fight, but I tend to stay out of their affairs."

He studied illustration and then, after a stint of stressful jobs, he started showing his art in galleries all over the world, represented by the Jonathan LeVine Gallery in New York. "I'm inspired by old folklore and fairy tales that excited my imagination as a child," he says.
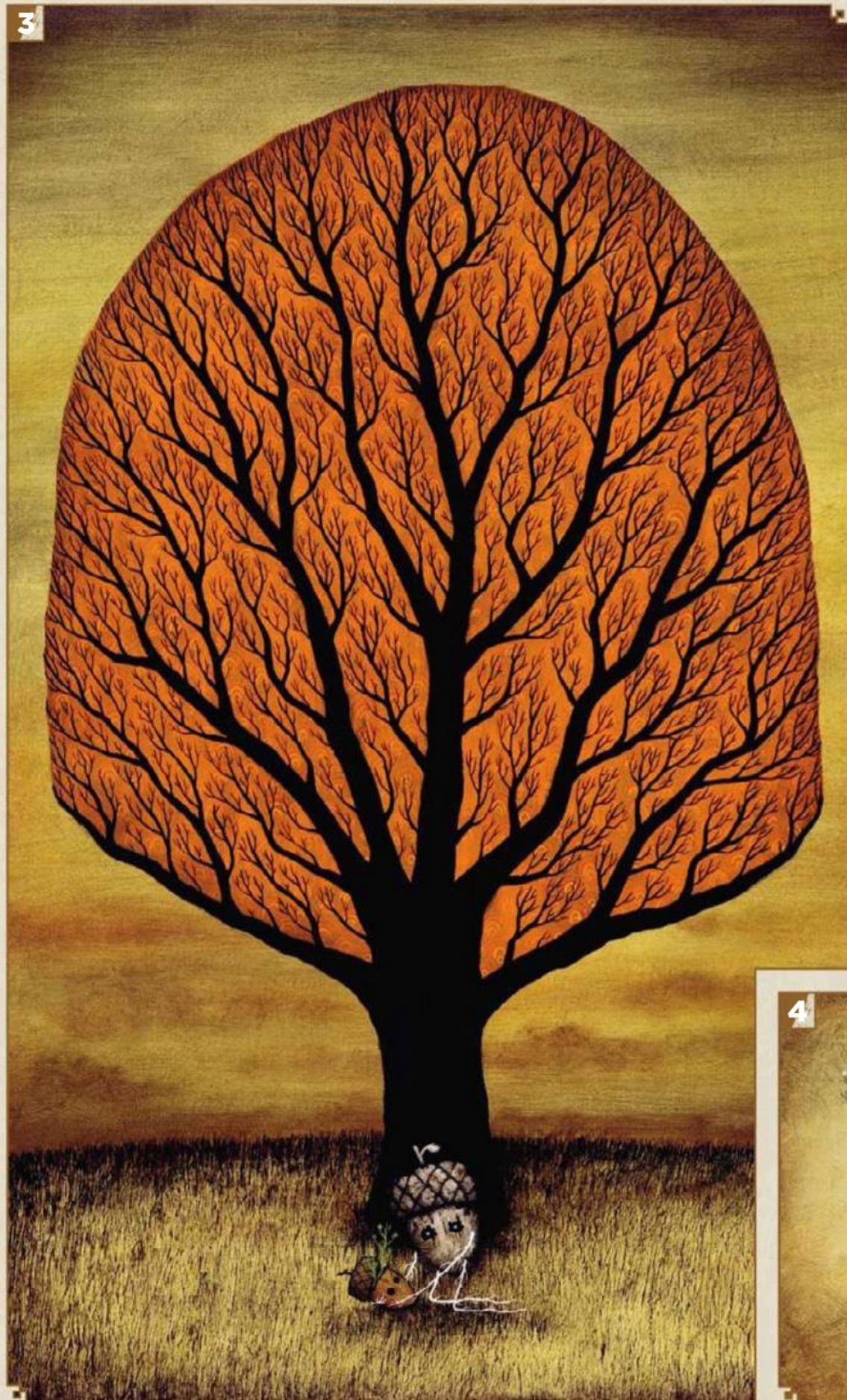
"Andy's stylised, colourful paintings encourage you to dig deeper into his imaginative stories, which always proves to be an eye-opening experience."
Ian Dean,
Deputy Editor

1 WELCOME TO COMING DAYS
24x16in, acrylic and oil on wood panel
"I did this piece for the Jonathan LeVine Gallery Fifth Year Anniversary show, which is an amazing gallery. This is what came to my head when I thought of our future collaborations."

2 PASSING THROUGH THE FOREST DEEP
36x24in, acrylic and oil on wood panel
"These two characters could be described as neurotic and paranoid – except most of their fears are well founded. Here, they're walking through a forest and are afraid that it's inhabited by spirits. As it turns out, spirits surround them and watch them the whole way."

3 BIDDING FAREWELL TO THE OLD AND DYING
16x24in, acrylic and oil on wood panel
"This is an Elder acorn helping an old acorn move on to the next life of being a tree. Acorns live a full life before falling to the ground in hopes of becoming a tree. There are a number of ancient trees in each forest and each one has an Elder acorn that guides the younger ones."

4 BUDDING YOUTH
9x9in, acrylic and oil on wood panel
"No big story behind this guy. Just a young bud."

Chris B Murray

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.chrisbmurray.com,
EMAIL: contact@chrisbmurray.com
MEDIA: Acrylics

"It was the vibrant colours and imagery of comics and illustrations that appealed to me as I was growing up," says Chris, "and helped me create a style I now can call my own."

Having studied the line work and compositions of his favourite comic book titles, Chris later discovered graffiti, which taught him colour schemes and how to create art without rules or guidelines. "These two elements eventually merged and helped from my current style," he says.

1 RADIODEAD
9x12in, acrylic on paper
"This image depicts my frustration with mainstream radio and the constant filth it pumps out. It was accepted into the Society of Illustrators 53 and Creative Quarterly, issue 22."

2 HONEY
9x12in, acrylic on paper
"This painting was inspired by my girlfriend Emily and is sort of a play on words. Obviously, I wouldn't wish her to be covered in angry bees... although she has her moments. This piece was featured in issue seven of 3x3 magazine."

3 THE HUNTER
12x12in, ink and acrylic paint
"This piece was originally supposed to be a birthday gift to my father; however, at the time I wasn't able to paint it for him. In the end it's a piece that's inspired by my father, Garth, who is The Hunter."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Chris's characters are linked by a theme of suspension. And whether defying gravity or poised to strike, there's real tension in all of them, backed up by some pretty wild narratives."
Beren Neale,
Staff Writer

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29 PAGES OF TUITION

68

74
80
90

This issue:

Photoshop
PAINT A FEARLESS FEMALE ASSASSIN

Dan LuVisi channels the Sucker Punch vibe into a strong action scene featuring a killer blow

Artist PROFILE

Dan LuVisi
COUNTRY: US

Dan's a conceptual and digital artist who lives in sunny California. He feels lucky to live a life where he's able to draw all day and, for some reason, get paid to do it.
www.danluvisiart.com

DVD Assets
The files you need are on your DVD in the Dan LuVisi folder in the Workshops section.

There are some obvious comparisons between the Sucker Punch style and the digital art I produced for my book, Last Man Standing. However, I realised I needed to make some distinct separations from that style and character types – who were all kick-ass bounty hunters – but at the same time magpie character traits and visual cues from Sucker Punch, applying a LuVisi take to it. Easier said than done.

The lead in Sucker Punch is fairly petite and fragile, whereas my female bounty hunters tend to appear more athletic, toned and cocksure.

I had to keep the weapons classic and when it came to colour, I needed to have a more de-saturated Colour Palette than I might for my usual approach.

In terms of a concept – and taking a cue from the title Sucker Punch – I really wanted to capture an impact moment in this image.

1 Sense of drama
My first thumbnails were too pin-up-esque and ImagineFX wanted a more dramatic shot. I ended up with the female stabbing a robot in the head.

2 Give yourself a guide
Next was the line art. While I've been trying to break away from such detailed line art of late, it's still incredibly helpful. It's just nice to have a basic guideline of what you're colouring in, keeping it all neat and so forth. What I usually do is increase the resolution on the thumbnail and draw my line art on top, on a separate layer.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

HAIR/SMUDGE BRUSH

I start off painting hair with the standard painting brush, then I go over it with this one, to create the strands. This is my ideal colour mixer for blending tones. It acts like a bristle brush and merges all those nice colours together to create a creamy feel.

CLOUD BRUSH

Used to paint clouds. 'Nuff said really.

LIGHTING BRUSH

This is the brush for lens flares over bright lights and glowing areas. Use it softly to achieve a nice bloom in your lighting.

DETAILING/PAINTING BRUSH

My favourite brush next to the Fur brush. This one is simply used to get those nooks and crannies. If I were to use the standard brush for 25 per cent of the painting, this would be the other 75 per cent.

ABRAMS/LIGHTING BRUSH

I use this brush to paint lighting effects in a lot of my images.

FUR BRUSH

My favourite brush. I use this for skin, fur, cloth, metal, sparks, debris, glass, anything. A hard shell to crack, but once you do it's a great brush.

GET THESE BRUSHES!

To try out Dan's brushes – and there are over 150 of them – go to the Downloads section at **www.imaginefx.com**.

3 Choose colours

Next, I throw in my colours. Because the theme of this image is Sucker Punch, we need to go for a greenish tone as portrayed in the film. I start to brush in my clouds with an assortment of Chalk brushes and cloud brushes, which you can get from **www.imaginefx.com/downloads**.

4 Introduce skin tones

I create a layer under the line art (as you can see, the face has changed) and I'll begin to colour in the skin tones with a Chalk brush. I'm just keeping it light and easy here.

5 Tackle the jacket and hair

Once I begin to blend my colours with the Smudge brush, I move onto the jacket. Same procedure: create a new layer and use a Chalk brush to lay down colours. I keep it loose and simple. I usually paint zoomed out, so I don't put in unnecessary details. The hair is painted in the same way as the jacket: I just block in colours.

6 Block in

Now I start blocking in some of the armour – the shoulder plate, straps and so on. As you can probably tell, the face has been going through levels of touch-ups and fixes. After I'm happy with the blocking in on the jacket and head, I move onto the skirt and legs.

7 Paint the leather boots

Next it's time to tackle our assassin's big, chunky leather boots. Again, I'm just blocking in the simple colours here. I've found that the best way to do it is to start off with the darkest of your colours and then shade in the highlights and reflected light.

8 Take the plunge and merge all the layers

Now, finally, I can begin to bring all of the pieces together. What I usually do is connect all the separate layers: the jacket, head, hair, legs and skirt and so forth. Once all connected, I merge them and begin to render them all as one piece.

9 Bring everything together

Here I start the rendering process, bringing all the details in and turning them into more than just a loose painting. I use the Blending brush to achieve those soft edges and smooth colours. I usually begin with the face – I like to complete that as soon as possible. I feel that once I'm happy with the painting, it becomes more fun to work on.

Shortcuts
Hard lines
Shift+pen (PC & Mac)
This is used to help draw hard lines on your screen. Comes in handy for swords, buildings and so on.

10 Hair strategy

I also start throwing colours down on the hair. You can really render hair in a thousand and one ways, but I find the easiest way to do it is to block in your colours first. Blend them together, then select a bristle-type Scatter brush and begin weaving in the threads of hair. Don't use a small brush to draw each strand of hair, unless it's flowing off the main body of it. Otherwise, get ready for a world of pain.

11 Add detail

As you can see, it is becoming a tighter painting. I've detailed the jacket, and added a layer of textures on some areas, such as the forearm of the jacket and her thigh-high stockings.

12 Onto the robot...

We now have a more 80s-themed Japanese robot. Again, I start with the line art, doing a loose sketch at first and then doing a full line art of it on top. In addition, you'll notice our heroine is no longer a brunette. This change was made towards the end of the painting process.
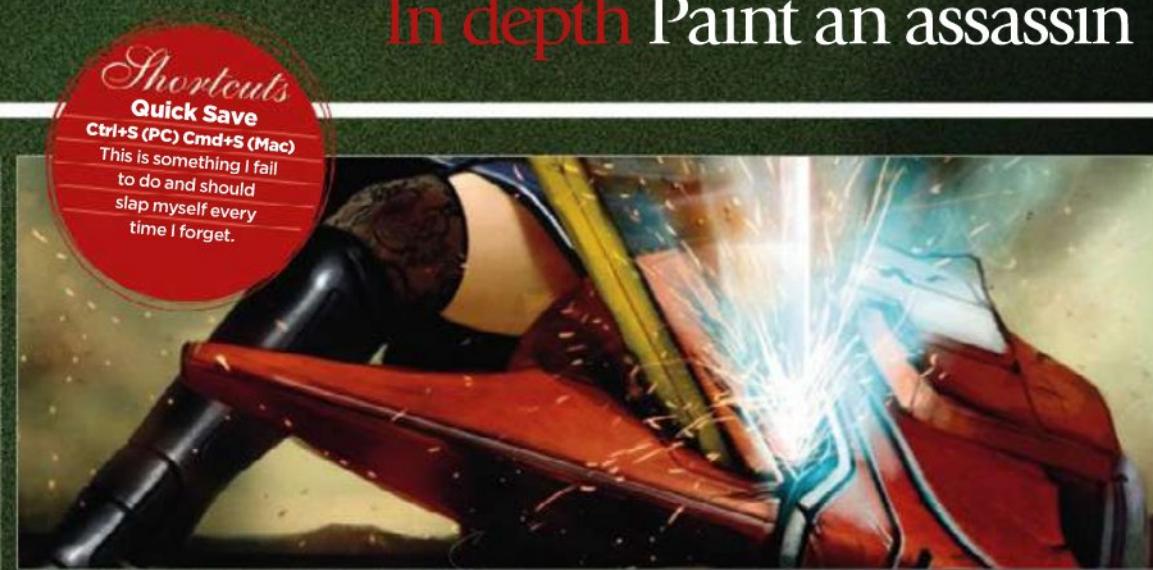
13 Choose a simple base colour

Like I said earlier, I'll block in a simple colour. A dark red that fits in with the other surrounding colours seems a good choice. So I begin shading on the head, using the Chalk brush to bring in tones and shading. No smudging or blending – just simple strokes.
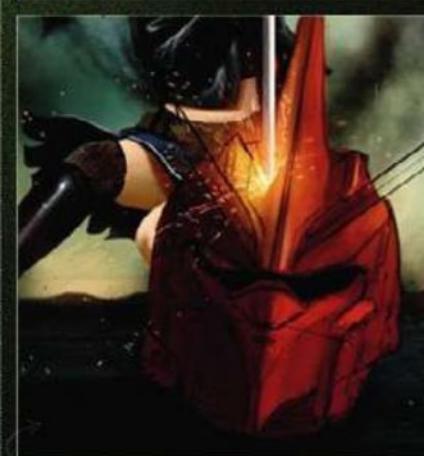
14 Robot variations

I bring in other colours: white trims, gold and so on. I add variation so it's not a big ugly block of red. Then I'll start rendering in, blending colours and so forth. I'll also create a Screen layer on top and start my lighting areas, using bright colours to push out hot spots.

15 Paint sparks

To depict sparks, I start with a new layer, set it to Screen and pick a bright colour. Go to the top toolbar, select Layer, then Layer Style>Outer Glow and choose the colour, size opacity, bluntness and so on. Try not to go too wild or your sparks will look fake. When done, I go to the same toolbar, select Outer Glow and Stroke. This will add a hard edge. Sometimes I might add a bit of motion blur, too.

16 Light bloom effect

Bloom isn't as hard as it looks. You usually add these sources of bloom to hot spots (white or bright colours near white). I use a soft brush (either the 100 or 300, size one), create a new layer on top and set it to Screen. The brush to use is on the left. Once I have it, I select a colour (not too bright) that's a shade of the hot spot. If it's warm then oranges, reds and yellows work; if it's cool then try blues, greens and creams. Lightly paint a nice layer of bloom where the light will peek through. Simple.

17 Final touches

This is mostly just me adding tiny details at the end, with a Chalk brush, refining areas and really bringing the whole picture together. Then you can finally stand back and applaud yourself. Good luck – hope you found this useful! ●

Photoshop
RAMP UP THE FEELING OF ACTION

Reynan Sanchez reveals how dynamic line art helps to drag the viewer into a pulsating, action-packed scene

Artist PROFILE

Reynan Sanchez

COUNTRY: Philippines

Reynan is a 25-year-old fine-arts student who's also working as a freelance digital artist. His influences are the classic fantasy art masters including, of course, the late, great Frank Frazetta.
artizako.cgsociety.org

DVD Assets
The files you need are on your DVD in the Reynan Sanchez folder in Workshops.

I often try to introduce a sense of dynamism into a good number of my paintings. After all, any action-packed scene is sure to have a lot of different things going on at the same time. So my main goal in this workshop is to put a lot of effort into making it look like a moving picture. Think of it as an image that tells its story through movement.

My influences and inspirations for this painting are too many to mention, but there's one that I need to highlight: the Chinese Manhua comics, which feature a drawing tradition that dates back to 3000 BC. I love how the artists of those great comic books conjured up engaging action and fight sequences. Indeed, how they created dynamic line art is pretty much what motivated me to produce this kind of artwork in the first place.

This is a personal piece and so I'm able to provide a highly detailed, high-quality image without having to follow any brief or set storylines. However, it was no speed painting. I worked on it in twice-weekly sessions of between two and three hours, so it took me months to finish everything that you can see here. But don't let that put you off!

Dynamic figures
The best real-life reference examples I can think of when I create this kind of scene are large explosions and tornados. Imagine how these events affect their surroundings, especially those that are closest to them. Examine how things around them behave, then keep this in mind and you'll eventually create a more accurate representation of a dynamic picture.

The flow
When I create an image, I usually start by depicting the source and then the effect. If you aim to tell a story using a still piece of artwork, try to make every image connect to each other in a continuous flow. Then show this through movements, reactions or even simple facial expressions.

Colour correction
When I've finished working on a painting, I usually correct the colour before saving my final image. Rather than using Image>Adjustment, I add a layer above every image on the canvas. I then pick a colour, apply it using the Paint Bucket tool, set the layer to Color Burn and lower the opacity below 50 per cent. It works pretty much like a filter that colour corrects everything – try it!

How I create...
A BATTLE SCENE

1 Build the scene
I build rough shapes with loose brush strokes, putting every key image on the canvas. I start painting the main character and then work on the others that surround him. It's important to choose the most appropriate pose for each figure, because this will dictate how my artwork tells its story.

2 Light and shade
I add some simple lighting and shadows, which help improve the forms, shapes and overall look. When I paint, I usually start from silhouette shapes to mid-tones and then add highlights. I also consider adding reflections. Everything that I've done here at this point is just the starting point before I move on to detailing the image.

3 Detailing
This is where I spend most of the time refining every part of the image until I'm satisfied. I try to be in control of every brush stroke that I create, because I want every shape, line and detail to be as dramatic as the story itself.

Painter
LEARN TO SCULPT WITH DIGITAL OILS

Create a strong composition and discover the key to making your digital paintings look traditional with **Kan Muftic's** expert advice

Ever since I switched to working digitally, I've always tried to recreate the creamy surface quality that you get with real oils. So far, Painter has proven itself as the best package to achieve that effect. I spent the past couple of years trying out different brushes and decided that the standard ones work best. Familiarise yourself with the behaviour of your brushes, focus only on few of them and you'll be surprised how easy it gets.

Artist PROFILE

Kan Muftic
COUNTRY: England

Kan is a concept artist and illustrator, with extensive experience in the video game, advertising, music and film industries.
kanmuftic.blogspot.com

DVD Assets
The relevant files are on your DVD in the Kan Muftic folder in the Workshops section.

However, this workshop isn't only about brushes. More than anything, it's about creating a strong scene and telling a complex story in a single image. You'll learn how to stage your characters and give them personality. Let's get going!

1 Explore the idea
I have the idea of a young girl singing a lullaby to a gentle giant. It's autumn and the leaves are falling, carried by the breeze. This is by far the most important step: getting as many possible compositional ideas in as possible. These messy doodles won't be normally shown to anyone so I'm not protective or careful at all. And that's also why I'll attempt to try out compositions that I wouldn't normally dare to, like tricky angles and poses.

2 Designing the girl
I don't want to make just another fantasy girl. Combining the fantastical aspect of a giant with a modern-day character could do the trick. This isn't a medieval giant; it's more likely that this fellow is some kind of a failed DNA experiment, hiding in suburbia. The more content you put in your mind, the better piece you'll create. So, I scribble a couple of simple designs and I still don't care about the quality of the drawing. Again, this is for my eyes only.

3 Designing the giant
I'm quite happy with the rough design of the giant, but I want to explore more variations. Scandinavian, Slavic and Asian mythology are my inspirations, so I draw a couple of designs and decide to go with the one with massive forehead and eyes placed far apart. It's important to try other options, because they might have worked better. ➤➤

4 Sketching the image

I open a new canvas in Painter and select Pencils>2B Pencil. I drag the variant underneath the Layers window and a customised toolbox appears. I'll be dragging all of my brushes in here as I go along so I don't have to search for my favourite brushes. Having solved my composition (step 1) and my character designs (steps 2 and 3) I can now allow myself to draw loosely and relaxed. In fact, I'm much more accurate if I'm not being too careful with my lines.

5 Oil Pastels

I select Oil Pastels from the brush menu and pick Oil Pastel 20. I drag this brush variant down into my toolbox next to my pencil brush, so it's there when I need it. Oil pastels offer a great range of blending and texture. This screenshot is an example of how they interact with each other.

6 Start colouring

I create a new layer and set it to Multiply, which will enable me to lay down the colours without losing the drawing. Some people start painting only in black and white to control the values better. I'm being cocky and go straight in with the colours. I want to use a warm palette in the background (because it's autumn) that will contrast with the skin tones of the giant.

7 Blender Bristle

This is by far my most favourite brush. It has incredible blending properties and is perfect for painting organic subjects. You can find it in the brush menu under Artists' Oils>Blender Bristle. Pictured here is an example of how versatile and wonderful this brush is. It's worth spending some time by just playing with the paint and exploring the possibilities of this tool.

8 Brave and bold

This is the business part of my process. I drag the Blender Bristle into my toolbox and set Opacity to 100 per cent. From this moment on, I stop using Undo and I work on only one layer. Any mistake will be fixed by repainting, which will create the effect of underpainting that's normally achieved only with the physical paint. I have my composition down, I have my drawing done and enough colours to pick from. I'm excited and keen to turn this into a nice piece.

PRO SECRETS

Limited toolbox

A musician told me once that he used to play all kinds of instruments, but never really got to the level he wanted. So he decided to only play keyboard and, after a while, he could do more with it than with all the other instruments he used to play. Focusing on certain tools gives you confidence and grace.

Shortcuts
Avoid RSI
Wacom properties (PC & Mac)
I set the pen clicks to Alt and Right-click to reduce my keyboard usage and avoid RSI.

9 Sculpting with paint

I'm putting down bold strokes and, at this point, I try not to blend colours. It seems like a step backwards, but this is necessary if I'm to achieve the desired effect. The best way to understand this method is to think of your paint as clay, which you use to sculpt the objects in your painting. Each stroke follows the form of the object. Each stroke is confident. Each stroke counts.
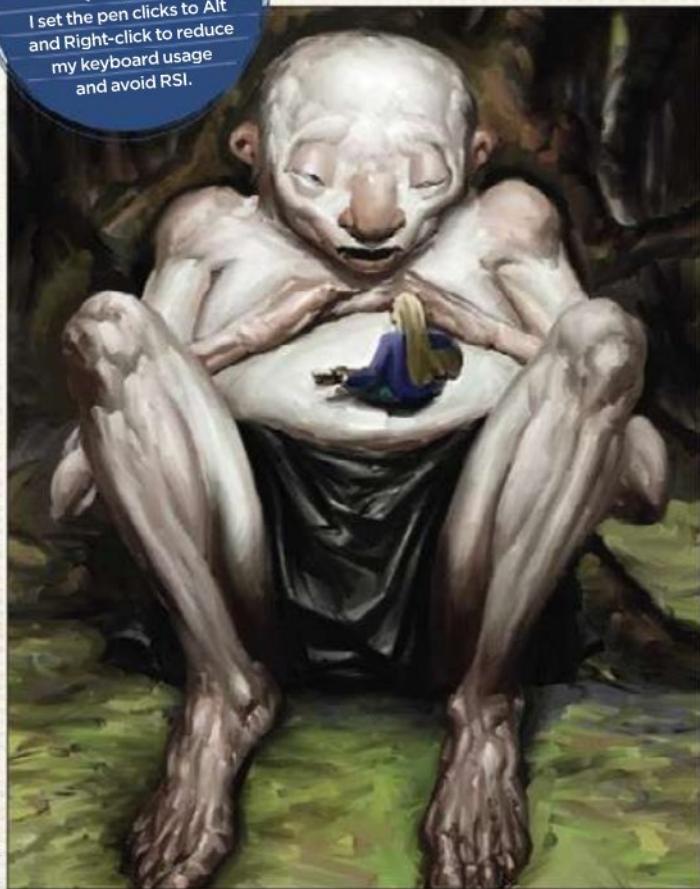
10 Refining my work

I flip the canvas to better spot mistakes and I start refining. I lower the opacity of my Blender Bristle to 50 per cent and start blending strokes into each other, never next to each other. I decide to keep the girl on his belly very simple because I don't want to disturb the harmony of the focal points in the piece.

11 A variety of hues

I'm putting lots of different hues while keeping them in the same value range. It doesn't seem to make a big difference at first, but those will pop out once I bring the contrast up.
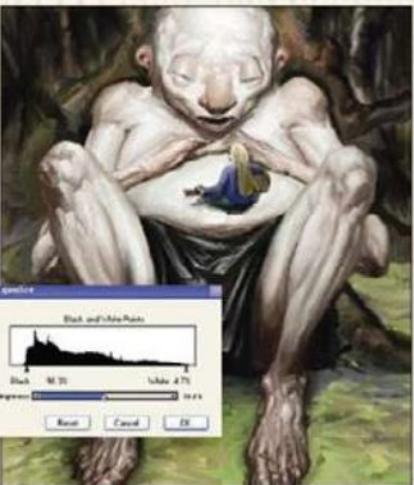
12 Pump up the value

Click the Dynamic Plugins icon in the Layers window and select the Equalize option. Try not to go crazy with this. Slightly increase the distance between your darks and brights and it should be fine.

13 Giving personality

I want the giant to look as if he's just about to fall asleep. He needs to look frightening but gentle, and pretty dumb. I use a mirror to try out facial expressions and then try to transfer the image I have in mind onto the canvas.

14 Adding leaves

Instead of spending lengthy amounts of time on rendering, I work on elements that'll enhance the mood. Falling leaves are wonderfully poetic and melancholic. Again, working bold with confident strokes is the key.

15 Finishing

I simplify the forest floor because it distracts from the main focus. I work a bit more on the giant's face and on the girl, but leave the rest loose and creamy because I don't think rendering equals quality. We can't focus on more than one point, and everything around the point of interest is blurry and vague. I also like to see the marks on a painting because they tell me the history of the piece and reveal the artist's thoughts process.

PRO SECRETS

File format
It makes sense to save your files in PSD format when working in Painter. That way, you can also work with those files in Photoshop, should you need to.

Shortcuts
Change brush quickly
Ctrl+Alt (PC) Cmd+Alt (Mac)
Hold this and the crosshair will appear. Drag your pen tip and the brush size changes.

16 Final check

I compare the initial thumbnail sketch next to my final piece to make sure I didn't deviate too far away from the original idea. Although it turned out different than I thought, I'm pleased that I did the groundwork and explored a range of variations before getting started.

17 Final words

Mastering the technical aspects of painting is obviously an ongoing task. Yet all the techniques in the world can't replace the life experience that's needed to give your art a sense of charm. Morning fog rolling over the streets, a scary hallway, a spectacular cloudscape, your favourite song, that look from the one you love… if we manage to bring these little moments from our lives into our art, we just might give someone time to reflect over their own experiences. Now that's a noble calling, right?

ArtRage
SKETCHING AND DRAWING TOOLS

Sharpening up on ArtRage's Pencil tool, and how Stencils and Rulers can be used to speed up the drawing process with **Simon Dominic**

To get started with ArtRage's hard media it's a case of simply selecting the Pencil tool and away you go! Straight from the get-go you'll produce a convincing graphite simulation that's straightforward to use.

Yet as is often the case, ArtRage provides some powerful extras that encourage you to get the best from the basic functions. Two such extras are Stencils and Rulers, which allow for anything from precision work, to textures and enhanced line smoothness.

Artist PROFILE
Simon Dominic
COUNTRY: England

Simon is a self-taught professional illustrator who specialises in fantasy and horror. He's worked on game card art, covers and more.
www.painterly.co.uk

1 The Pencil Tool

Select Pencil from the Tool Picker. In the Settings panel, configure Pressure, Graphite Softness and Angular Tilt, which simulates drawing with the edge of the pencil (0 per cent equals point, 100 per cent equals full-on edge). Tick Precise and you'll see Tilt is replaced by Smoothing. Try setting Smoothing to 100 per cent – ideal for character construction lines. Try out the Crayon and Chalk tools, too.

2 Using Stencils

Choose View>Stencil Collection. Click the Textures group and select Turbulent. With the Chalk tool, draw over this Stencil. See how the Stencil's varying opacities generate texture. Hold Space and drag (or Right-Click+drag) to move the stencil, Option/Alt+drag to zoom, Cmd/Ctrl+drag to rotate. Trying holding Shift when rotating and zooming.

3 Using Rulers

Rulers are a type of Stencil and, like their real-world counterparts, enable you to trace round their edges. In Stencils, choose the Ruler from the Rulers group. Place the cursor slightly over the Ruler and draw. Your line will appear along the nearest edge. Rotate and elongate the Ruler using the end grips. Right-click the Ruler for more options. Any Stencil can be used as a Ruler and vice-versa.

GRASP ARTRAGE'S STENCIL SYSTEM

A. Show Stencils
Display a list of Stencil Groups.

B. Add Stencils
Bring in your own Group.

C. Import a Stencil
Import a Stencil from a greyscale image on disk.

D. Quick view of Stencils
Thumbnails of Stencils in a Group.

E. Manage Stencils
Stencil loading and organisation menu.

F. Configure Stencils
Right-click a Ruler or Stencil to get the options menu.

G. Stencil, Ruler or Guide?
Choose Stencil, Ruler or Guide mode.

H. Move Stencil
Orient the Stencil on the Canvas.

I. Invert the Stencil
Opaque becomes transparent and vice-versa.

J. Reset orientation
The Stencil rotates around the Pin Position.

K. Hide/remove Stencil
Hide the Stencil or remove it completely from the canvas (it will remain in the Group).

L. Save Stencil
Save the Stencil into a folder as an image.

Photoshop

GIVE YOUR ART A TRADITIONAL LOOK
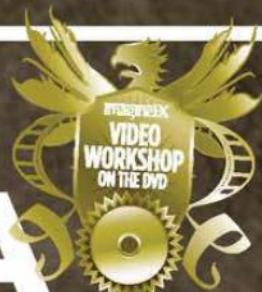
Discover how applying a few digital tricks will enable you to paint a dark fantasy image with a watercolour feel. **Erin Kelso** goes bird spotting…

What makes something 'dark fantasy'? I'd never thought about the question until ImagineFX asked me to create an image with a dark fantasy theme for this workshop. Of course, the first thing I did was Google 'dark fantasy' to see what other artists were doing. But naked faeries in lingerie on swirly purple backgrounds don't seem particularly dark to me.

Because they're full of horrible things, I decided to look to traditional fairy tales and myths for inspiration. Take the harpy, for example: a huge, predatory bird with the head of a beautiful woman and a taste for sailors. I think that's pretty dark and the character is a good fit for what I want to create. I'll give the harpy a little anatomy update, but I want to keep that classic illustration look for the image.

Key to creating an old-school look lies in starting with some detailed line work and using texture overlays to give a traditional watercolour feel. Keeping your colour palette subdued or limited also helps. Look to classic children's book illustrators, such as Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac and Gustaf Tenggren, for inspiration. You'll soon have people asking if your work is digital or traditional.

Artist
PROFILE

Erin Kelso
COUNTRY: US

Erin is a science teacher who moonlights as a freelance artist. She enjoys creating traditional fantasy art using modern techniques.
www.bluefootedb. blogspot.com

DVD Assets
The files you need are on your DVD in the Erin Kelso folder in the Workshops section.

ON THE DVD
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP
CUSTOM BRUSHES: CLOUD 1 BRUSH

I use this brush to make the fine mist between the foreground and the background.

SNOW BRUSH

I use this brush to add some details to areas of snow in the background. I've also used it to add texture to the tree bark and moss.

1 Prepping the line art
I'm starting this project with an ink sketch. This is a loose, quick drawing that I know I'm going to have to fix in Photoshop. Once I scan the lines in, I clean up the most obvious mistakes, darken the image if necessary, then copy my lines to a transparent layer. To do this I go to the Channels tab and click Load channel as selection, then Select>Inverse to grab the white background, and hit Delete to get rid of it. Then I copy and paste my lines into a new transparent layer.

2 Cleaning it up
First I darken my lines by locking the transparency of the layer and painting everything black with a big, round brush. It helps to have a white background in the layer below, so I can see what I'm doing. Then I go about fixing all the little stray marks and stuff that I screwed up in the original drawing. I have to unlock the layer to make these changes. I make a few tweaks to her face and arm. I just wasn't happy with the way they looked once I'd gotten them up on the screen.

3 Blocking in colour
Once I'm happy with the line work I add base colours to the three main subjects: the harpy, the tree she's sitting in, and the background. I make a background that's simply a colour gradient on its own layer. This will serve as a placeholder for now. I almost always end up changing it as the piece progresses. I paint the colours for the harpy and the tree on separate layers. I'll be able to lock the transparency of these layers later when I need to adjust the colours. ➥

4 Adding texture

Some artists like to wait until the image has matured before adding a texture overlay, but I like to slap one on before I do any serious painting. Colours and brushstrokes can look so different depending on the texture you use, so why wait until the last minute to make a decision? If you have a good camera, you can make your own textures out of pretty much anything, but I get my textures from free texture sites (**www.mayang. com/textures** is a good one). Set the texture layer to Overlay so that it'll affect any layers below it. I adjust the saturation and, usually, the colour on the texture layer to achieve the right look.

5 Defining the character

I add some highlights to the harpy's skin and give her rosy cheeks using a small, hard Round brush followed by the smoothing with the Smudge tool. With the line work layer locked, I can change the colour of the lines to give her a softer look. With the layer unlocked, I use the Smudge tool to further soften the lines, especially those that define her skin and hair. Often I'll erase some of the line work in areas where it looks too heavy after colouring. I think most of what I do is 'colouring' rather than 'painting'. My goal is to keep that classic storybook style, which needs relatively little rendering.
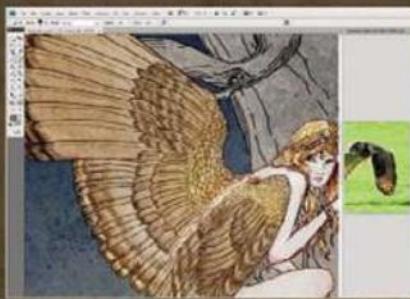
6 Give her wings

I dig up a photo reference of an owl in flight to give her wings a touch of realism. I use a simple Round brush with the Opacity set low to slowly build different layers of lighter and darker tones, especially in areas where I want to depict soft transitions between colours.

7 Deciding on a setting

Sometimes I start off with a background already planned out. And sometimes I wait until the central figures are basically finished first. It just depends on what I want to accomplish. Here, I want the harpy to pop, so I wait to see how she turns out before deciding what kind of setting to put her in.

PRO SECRETS

Tweak your line work

Don't fall in love with your line work! As you add colour to your image, you may find lines that looked great on paper become too heavy or too light, or are simply no longer needed. Don't be afraid to erase or redraw as your work progresses. I usually make several changes after my initial line drawing is finished. After all, the final image is what matters.

8 Crop for a better composition

I hate cutting off parts of my tree, but at this point that a slightly shorter piece makes for a better-finished composition. So I crop out the wasted space at the top and bottom of the image. I can now appreciate the better focus this composition gives to the main character.

9 Change the hair colour

I feel the blonde hair isn't working. Using the Lasso tool with a feather of 20 pixels, I make a rough selection of the hair and use Replace Colour to make the subject brunette. If you think that you must change the shade of one part of the image drastically, it's better to do it early on in the drawing process: at this stage you haven't put in too much detail, giving you more room to experiment.

10 Adjusting the background

I don't want my trees to be flat. With the Background Tree layer locked, I add some simple colour variation to define nearer and farther branches.

11 Making it snow

I really like the effect the trees on a plain white background. When I started I was sure this was going to be a night scene, but the lighter background appealed to me, so I made it a snow scene. At this point, I just block in the snow and a few hints of shadows.

PRO SECRETS

Manage your textures

Keep the resolution of your texture overlay in mind. Using a texture that's too small for your image will give you pixel problems. You might also lose all of the fine details that a good texture can bring to your image. To make a large texture from a smaller one, simply tile the original to get the size you need. Then use the Healing Brush (set to 'Normal') to erase the seams between the smaller pieces.

12 A touch of gold

Now that the image is coming together, I like to re-evaluate the work I've done on the main character and focus on some smaller details. The harpy's headdress and jewellery need some attention. To add the gold touches to her bracelet and jewels, I use the Healing brush set to Replace to sample from a scan of gold leaf. This works very well for highlighting small areas.

13 Dark details

To me, the darkest images are those that appear pleasant at first – until you look a little closer and discover the disturbing details. I knew from the start this wasn't just going to be a portrait of a cute naked girl with wings. I like to put some details, like the blood on her mouth and hand, in their own layers because I never know how much is too much until I've gone too far. It's so easy to overdo the splatter. I also do a little work on the snow and add some mist between the foreground and the background to push the trees a little farther back.

14 Fix problem areas

The squirrel I'd originally drawn in her hand just isn't working for me anymore: it looks awkward in the composition and the mood it sets is a little too light-hearted for what I'd had in mind. I think a white dove works better, especially because it repeats the white found in the background. Plus, dead doves are just less silly than dead squirrels. I also added an extra branch to break up the trees in the back a little bit.

15 Final tweaks

It's time to step back and make sure everything still works. I decide to add another texture overlay to give the image a warmer tone – it's just a personal preference of mine. I decrease the saturation on the trees a little to make the central figure pop. I repaint a few of the highlights on her wings and eyes that got lost during the previous steps. And the final image is done!

Painter & Photoshop
PUT YOUR COMPS INTO PERSPECTIVE

Marc Simonetti reveals how to bring three-point perspective from your initial composition into the finished picture

Artist PROFILE

Marc Simonetti
COUNTRY: France

Marc is a professional artist who has worked across a variety of industries during his seven-year career. He has created cover art for Terry Pratchett's novels, concept art for video games and feature films, and matte paintings for TV advertisements and illustrated comics.
www.marcsimonetti. artworkfolio.com

DVD Assets

The files that you need are on your DVD in the Marc Simonetti folder in the Workshops section.

Perspective is a key theory to master if you want to produce great illustrations. It should be used at the very beginning of the art process, no matter what you're painting. Understanding how to apply the rules of perspective will anchor and develop your creative skills. It's a powerful technique that'll enable you to express many different ideas, and it's also a good way to help build up and strengthen the composition of a painting.

To simplify things, I like to think of the various perspective theories, such as the rule of the thirds and divine proportion, as tools. Consider them as a kind of language to communicate exactly what you want to express. Treated this way, any uncertainty over how to use perspective soon vanishes.

I'm going to demonstrate different uses of perspective that depend on the subject, and then go through my process of creating a fantasy landscape with a slightly deformed three-point perspective. I'll start the image off in Photoshop and then finish it in Painter. I'll focus on the set-up of the vanishing points, and look at ways to achieve depth and volume using some useful Photoshop and Painter tools, such as the Level Layer or the Gradient Panel.

So, let's see some different configurations of perspective when drawing some typical fantasy scenes. I often use grey values to create my sketches, because it's a quick way to see how the finished image might look. I begin sketching my scene in three different perspectives to get an idea of where I want to take the painting… ➡

1 One-point perspective

The most used perspective technique is the one-point perspective. I love it when I have some huge elements to represent, because this is a great way to show scale and depth in a painting. In this example I'm applying low contrast and high luminosity to the background. Painting dark values on the foreground elements, such as the trees and horseman, naturally creates the depth and easily demonstrates scale.

2 Two-point perspective

This perspective method makes it possible to introduce more complexity to a scene, and enables me to flesh in more of the structure of the building on the rocks in the background. Furthermore, I'm able to create some interesting fragile structures in the foreground, using the rule of the thirds to lead the viewer's eye to the chasm. To make objects of interest pop I paint light on darks and darks on lights, and add detailed elements to simple colour planes.

3 Three-point perspective

The three-point perspective technique is useful when depicting awesome fantastical locations, when you need to inspire feelings of vertigo in the viewer! You can always cheat a little bit by placing the vanishing points too close together, but remember to keep the outlandish areas created fairly clean, to make it look more elegant. In this example I've tried to vary the different volumes inside the main planes to maintain interest in the illustration. When representing a city, adding some windows or distant characters gives the scene a dramatic scale.

4 Impressing the viewer

Each particular scene or mood has some graphical elements, such as the reflections of the water, birds or leaves in the sky, or snow on the ground, that contrasts with the dark rocks. The composition can become a huge, complex subject depending on what you want to express in terms of mood and elements. A three-point perspective introduces an impressive or dynamic feeling, and this is reinforced in my 'looking-upwards' sketch by tilting the illustration a few degrees anti-clockwise.

5 Creating the grid

I've decided to go with the three-point perspective. To create my fourth sketch I first use a vanishing-point brush on three different layers. Two of them are similar to the two-point perspective set-up, aligned to the horizon line, and the third one represents the vertical aspect of the piece. The vertical lines cross the horizon line within the illustration. I have to cheat a little and so I make the ground curvy to make it look less odd.
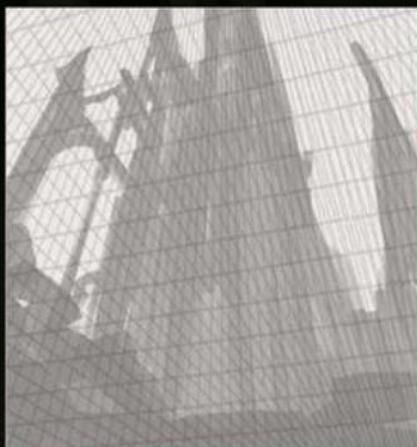
6 Setting a focus point

I follow the perspective lines because this helps me build the primary shape in my illustration: a huge castle. Because I want the piece to have some depth, I create a path at roughly the right-most third of the picture. There's one vanishing point in the picture and I follow it several times, building up volume as I go. I notice there's already something here that's beginning to catch my eye. At this stage it's important to try many things and see the illustration in its broadest sense without focusing on detail.

7 Moving mountains

I feel the piece isn't dynamic enough, so I tilt the perspective lines to inject some movement into the scene. I select all my layers, including the perspective folder, and modify all of them by pressing Ctrl+T. This adjusts the perspective and the global layout in one go. Tilting the view is a good trick when you want something slightly disturbing. You can see some good examples when watching the Lord of the Rings films by Peter Jackson.
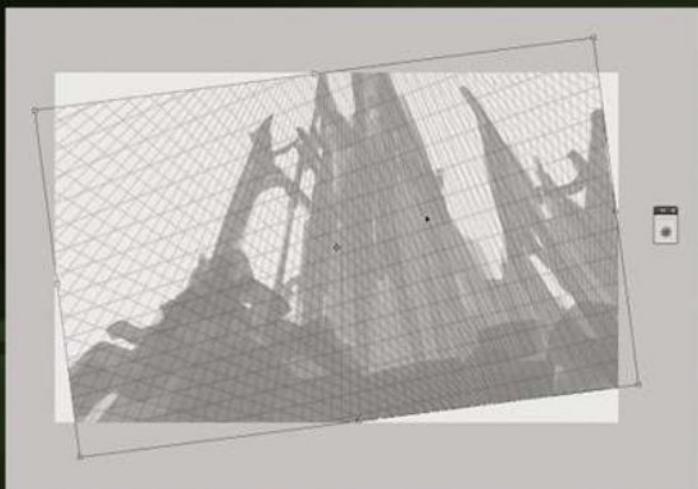
8 Using layers

I create my castle on a separate layer. This way I can easily select it by pressing Ctrl+left click on the thumbnail in the Layer Panel. Another way to do this would be to use the Transparency Lock feature in the Layer Panel. I now apply some darker values to my rough castle shape, making it pop away from the sky behind. It also begins to give my scene a more realistic feel.
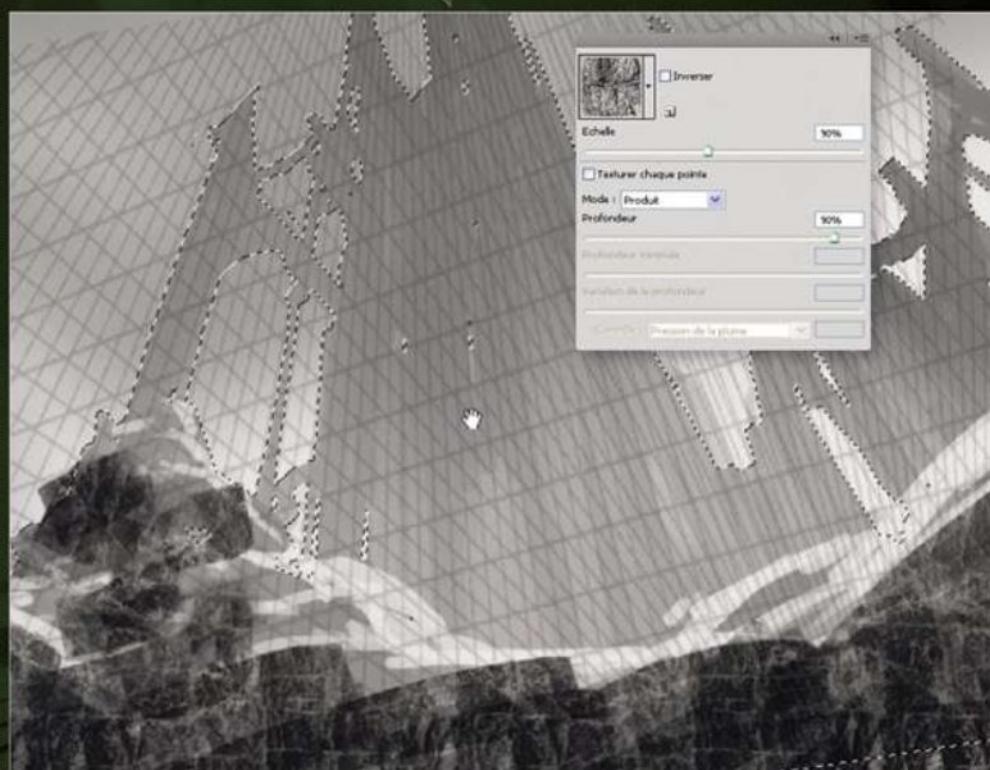
9 Create a rock brush

It's better to paint light colours and shades on darker values. With this in mind I prepare the brush I'll be using to create the foreground. It's a simple square brush onto which I apply a tiled rock pattern using Windows>Brushes> Textures. When the rock brush is used with dark tones, there's a gradient of dark values to light, from close up to far away. I'll keep this set-up from now on.

10 Follow the lines

I now begin to paint, using the perspective grid that I created earlier as a guide to build up the volume, which in turn will increase the viewer's interest in the illustration and add depth to my castle. At this stage I just follow the lines to draw the main shapes – I'll add detail later on. For now I just focus on the rhythm of the volumes of the scene.

11 Adding depth

In Photoshop, whether you're working either in colour or in greys, you can easily add more depth, play with contrasts, or just recalibrate an illustration using the Level layer. This is a priceless feature! Just add the Level layer above the layers you're painting on (in Layers>Adjustment Layers>Levels) and then paint in white or black to define the areas where the effect is going to be applied.
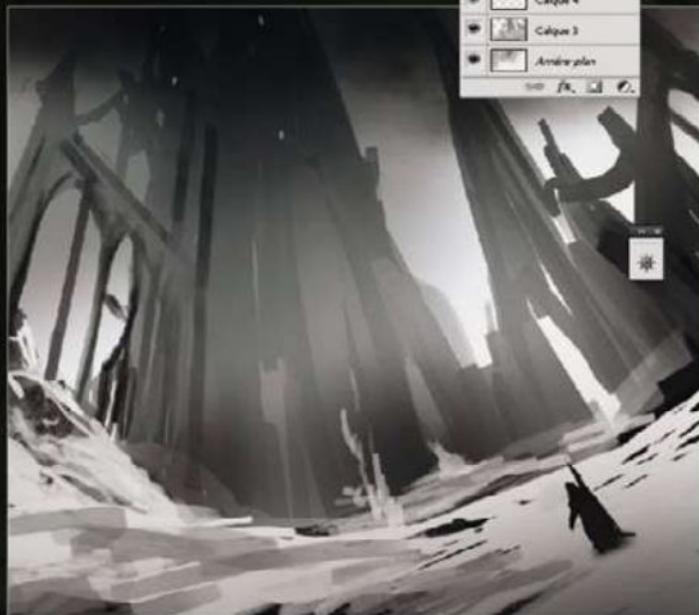
PRO SECRETS

Using Levels Adjustment layers

This tool lightens or darkens parts of the picture without losing any details. It works both in colours and in white and black, and you can also use it on separated channels. For example, if you painted a dinosaur with all its scales and textures, but without any light information, you can make the shadows slightly blue and a yellowish light, just by painting with two Level Adjustment layers.

Try all the Layer modes – Multiply and Overlay work well for me

Select your gradient here

Click the Fill menu to access the Gradient options
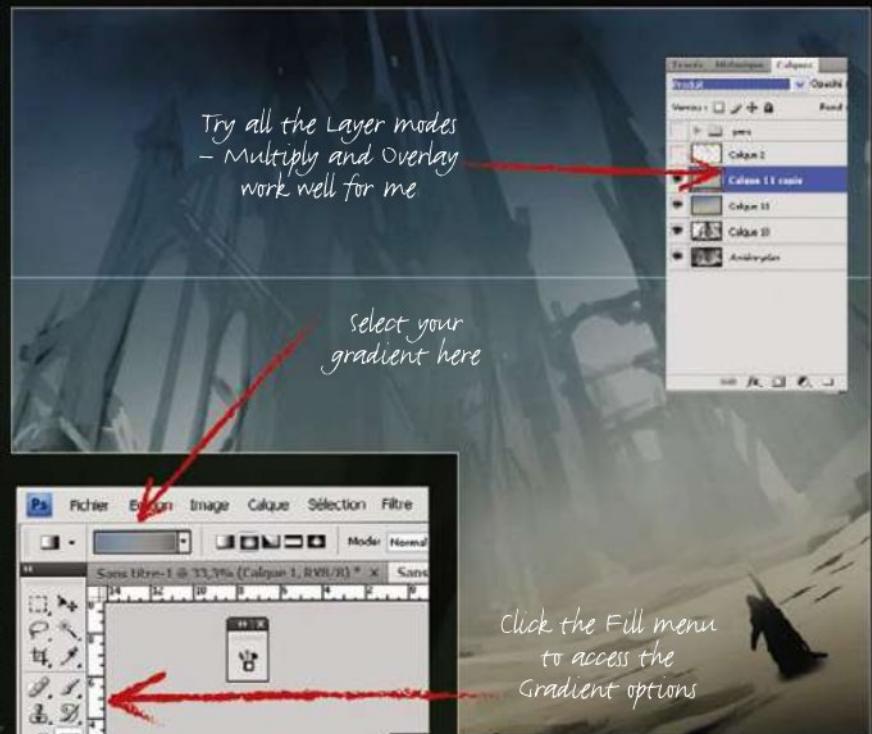
12 Adding colour

The first drop of colour can be made in many ways. I find that one useful method is to start with a custom gradient; this can be made from a sky shot. The Gradient tool comes in handy because you can adapt it perfectly to your picture. I use it in Multiply mode at the beginning as I add colour. It stops the typical desaturated effect that occurs when painting colours onto a white and black picture. I now need to readjust the values – reintroducing light tones where needed – with a Levels layer.

13 Switching software

My scene is now set in Photoshop so I flatten most of the layers, leaving me three to use: one with the entire painting; another with just the castle; and the perspective grid. Now I open my scene in Painter. Each brush in Painter is great, but I recommend that you spend some time experimenting with the brushes to discover the ones that best suit your way of working. When in Photoshop I find it's essential that I create my own brushes; in contrast, Painter's default brushes are great as they are.

14 Using brushes

I begin to paint all the details on the canvas, mostly using the Soft Pastel brush and the new Hard Media Pencils. I keep zooming in and out to maintain a global view of the illustration. I use Soft brushes inside the volumes and make hard edges with Hard brushes. This separate the objects from the one another, such as the castle from the sky. I also use the Pinch brush (found within the Distortion set) to achieve this effect.

15 Painting light

I now turn my attention to the scene's light sources and the global lighting of the environment. It's important to make the illustration believable as well as engaging. Even if the shadows aren't perfectly placed, the direction of the light should be obvious. Because my scene features snow and ice surfaces, I mirror the colours in the sky, because the only source of light in the shadows on the snow comes from the sky.

16 Adding detail

Two other important elements of my painting are the castle windows and the character. Both add to the composition and the perspective. I add light to the windows in the dark areas of the castle to give the building a sense of scale. It's also more interesting than a blank wall. My character anchors the story – I have purposely set him outside of the rule of thirds but he plays his role in giving the scene a sense of scale and creating a medieval mood. Use Painter's Digital Watercolour to add colour quickly and easily to these elements, but don't forget to dry the layer once it's done.
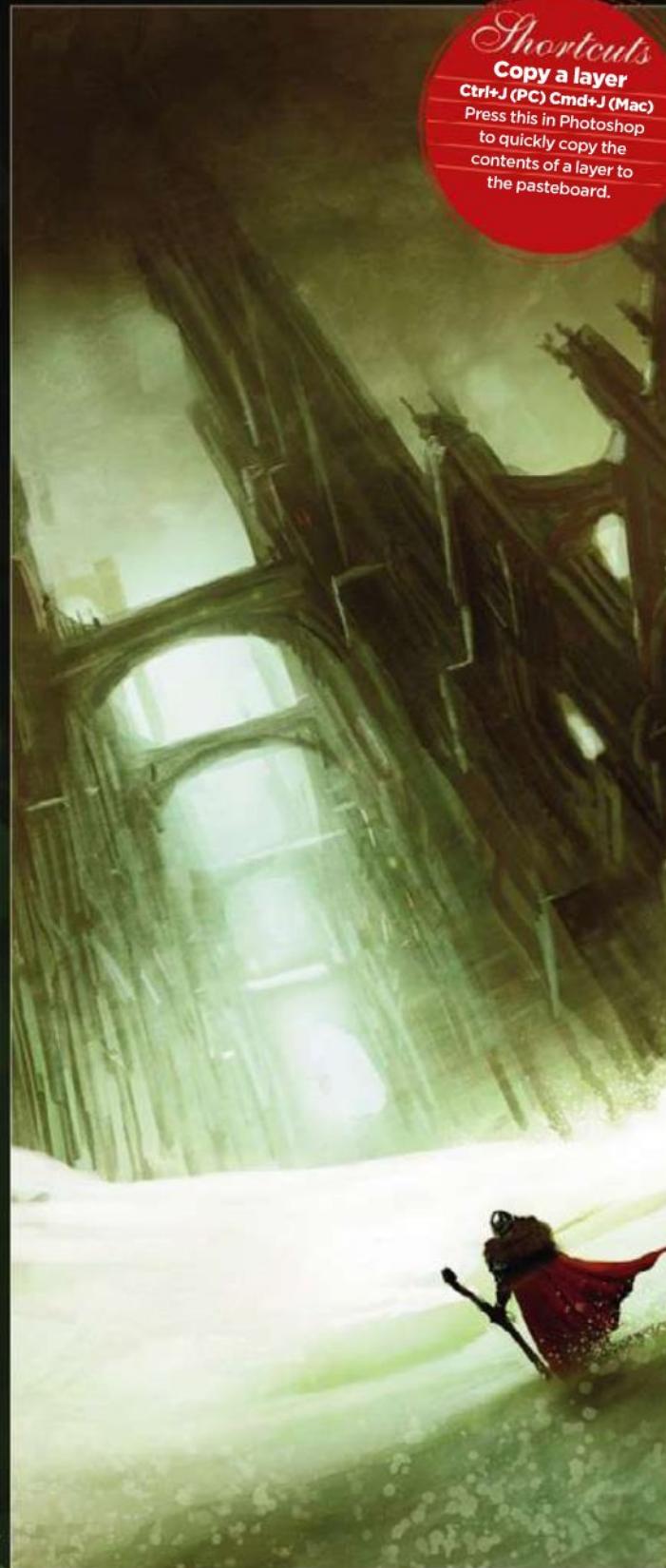
17 Finishing touches

My illustration is complete! The mood is set by the view and the colours, while the focus is on the architecture and the character. I make some final adjustments to the scene, correcting the colours with more colour balancing, and add some snow floating in the air to create the impression of a moody, windswept blizzard.

Photoshop
CREATE A FANTASY SHIP USING PHOTOS

Learn how to take a concept ship from initial pencil sketches to finished digital painting, following **Ian McQue's** tips on reference and observation

Good observational drawing skills are crucial if the viewer is going to believe in the world you're presenting to them. To help sell the story, I find gathering real-world reference and making sketches in the field are invaluable in making the image believable, giving it a real resonance with the viewer.

I spend a lot of time gathering reference in the form of sketchbook drawings and digital photographs before I go anywhere near a computer. I'd advise any artist not to discard traditional materials for digital

equivalents, because of the freshness that's inherent in a loose, gestural sketch. These warm-up sketches are also a great way to explore form and composition. When scanned, these gestural marks can inform a lot of the details that emerge throughout the painting process. It's important for me to retain that looseness for as long as possible.

I'm always on the lookout for an interesting vehicle or visual element I can later use in a painting, so carrying a sketchbook and camera at all times is vital. I live on the east coast of Scotland,

where there are lots of opportunities to visit old ports and harbours – usually packed with small fishing boats and the occasional trawler. Endless inspiration can be found in these types of places; from the curving lines and rich textures of the boats, to the activity of fisherman busy preparing for the next trip out to sea.

This painting, Lightship, was inspired by just such a visit to the Isle of Skye and the lighthouse and abandoned jetty at Neist Point. The structure and texture of the old crane provided ideal fodder for one of my floating ship concepts.

1 Gather sketches and references

Before beginning a painting, I'll take the time to scan all the drawings and sketches I've done, and gather any relevant reference images together in a series of image files – I call them ref boards. They can be quite large in size; I usually go for something like 4,000x8,000 pixels. This is so that I can see a range of detailed reference in one file, rather than having to hunt around minimising and maximising images, which can be annoying and time-consuming, as well as disrupt my train of thought.

2 Bring in the chosen line art

I create a new file in Photoshop and drag in the sketch that will form the basis of the painting onto a new layer, which I name 'Line art'. I'll scale the sketch up or down at this point if necessary to fit the canvas. I don't worry too much about the overall composition at this stage; I like to let that develop in response to painting as it progresses.

3 Adding colour

Next, I create a new layer (setting the mode to Multiply, with Opacity at 100 per cent) calling it 'Colour'. Using a Dry Media brush I start adding colour, using the line art as a rough guide. I like using the Dry Media brushes for weathered, rusty textures – they provide a combination of broken line and colour that's ideal for these sorts of materials. I'm not aiming to be too precise at this blocking-in stage. I'm following the ref board, which I have open on a second monitor. I've got a general palette in mind already, but I'm picking up cues here and there from the assembled reference. ➡

Workshops

4 Texture considerations

What I'm looking for now is an impression of age and weathering, as if this ship has seen a lot of storms in its time. I'm not adding shadow values at this stage, for reasons that will become clear. This is purely about colour and texture, as I try to build up a surface patina that will give me the richness and depth I'm looking for. I'm also adding spots of complementary colour – balancing the overall red/orange palette of the ship with areas of blues and grey-greens. Using a fairly transparent, broken colour brush stroke of a blue over an orange will give the surface a sparkle that'll really lift the painting.
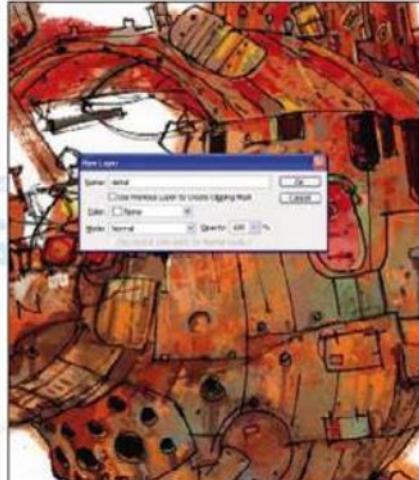
5 Adding detail and defining structure

Once I'm happy with the texture quality, it's time to move on to structural detail. I add a new layer (Normal mode setting at 100 per cent Opacity), which I name 'Detail'. At this point I still need the line art as a guide, but I lower its layer opacity to around 30 per cent. This helps me to see the detail layer more clearly, while giving me the freedom to interpret the line art as I go. Starting with a small, square brush I begin to define the structure of the ship and pick out the important details, again using the ref board as a guide. I'm still not being too fussy here, because this is an iterative process and the image is tightened up as the piece progresses. This is a fun, noodly exercise, where I can really go to town on all the crusty little details, such as rivets, hatches and exhaust ports, emphasising the parts of the line art that I like and dispensing with the parts I don't feel work.

6 Cropping the image

Next, I merge the detail layer down to the colour layer using Ctrl+E. Once this is done, I can start defining the ship's outline using the line art to guide me, concentrating on the negative space in and around the ship. To do this I use the Lasso tool in conjunction with Alt. This enables me to draw complex selections, isolating the areas I want to delete.

7 I name this ship...

After this is complete, it's time to name the ship. I type the name in an appropriate font, then merge the text on to its own layer above the ship image. Then, with the Transform tool, I use a combination of scale, rotation and perspective transforms to fit the text to the stern area of the boat. Next, I use the Eraser to rub away some of the text to simulate flaking, weathered paint, then merge this layer with the ship.
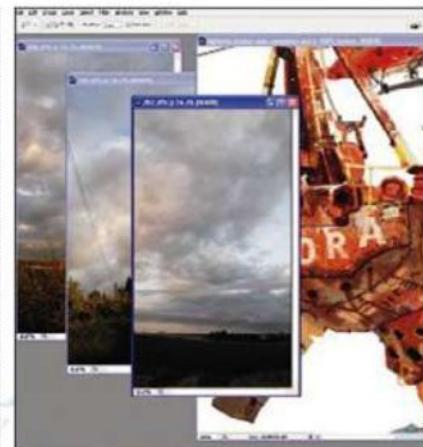
8 The sky's the limit

I start thinking about the background sky, digging into a folder of photos I've taken previously. When I've found the kind of thing I'm looking for, I drag it into its own layer called 'Sky'.

9 Shady business

Now I need to add shadows to the ship. I duplicate the ship layer, then call up the Hue/Saturation dialog and alter the sliders until the image is a desaturated, dark violet/blue – the sky background should dictate what colour the shadows should be. I now have a version of the ship in full shadow. However, I'd like to show the evening sun falling on it, so I erase the areas that would be fully lit. Choosing the Lasso tool once more, I set the Feather dialog to 55 pixels and check the anti-alias box. I then draw selections around the areas I wish to be in sunlight and hit Delete. This erases the shadowed area, effectively drawing in the lit sections. I continue erasing areas of the shadow-ship with Lasso selections and the Eraser, merging it down to the ship layer when complete.

12 Secondary ships

With the main focus of the image now complete I move on to tackle the composition. I want the sky to appear busier and to have the feeling of a harbour, so I look through the initial ship sketches until I find a design I like. Dragging it onto its own layer under the main ship, I begin the process again: colour and texture over line art, then detailing on top of that. The sky's still a bit empty, so I make a duplicate of the main ship, making slight adjustments to hide the fact that it's simply a copy. I scale this down and place it beyond the main ship, as if it's at some distance.

Shortcuts

Hide Selection marquee
Ctrl+H (PC) Cmd+H (Mac)
Hide those 'marching ants' so that you can see what you're doing more clearly.

10 Window dressing

Now I zoom in on the top of the lighthouse section and start detailing the interior and windows. This should be fairly impressionistic – I want to hint at the kind of gubbins you'd expect to find on a ship like this, rather than being too literal. I create a new layer named ' Lamp'; this layer will sit behind the ship layer while I'm painting the interior, which lies beyond the windows. To indicate the glass, I first draw a selection using the Lasso tool while holding down Alt. I then pick the Gradient Fill tool, choosing the Foreground to transparent setting in the menu. With Mode set to Normal and Opacity at around 30 per cent, I fill the selected area, using a bright off-white as my foreground colour. This should imply the reflective quality of the glass.

11 A sense of a scale

With the ship nearing completion, I go over it once more, tightening details and generally refining the form of the ship in a final pass. I now add a character to the deck of the ship to give a sense of scale and a bit of life. Opening a scan of a sketch I'd made earlier, I drag it on to its own layer above the ship, working this element up in the same way I did with the ship, scaling it to fit the deck space.

13 Aerial perspective

The painting is still lacking some context, so I quickly paint in a roofscape and distant horizon, again adding depth to the image plane. The painting looks fine, if a little flat, so I need to introduce some aerial perspective – the haziness that makes objects appear to recede into the distance. I do this by adding a new layer beneath the main ship, picking the Gradient Fill tool again and using the same settings as before. Choosing a light grey foreground colour, I introduce the gradient, starting at the bottom of the image. It has the effect of creating distance between the foreground ship and those beyond it. I add more atmospherics in the form of smoke billowing from chimneys and exhausts, which also lends movement to the composition. A flock of birds provides some extra movement and depth.
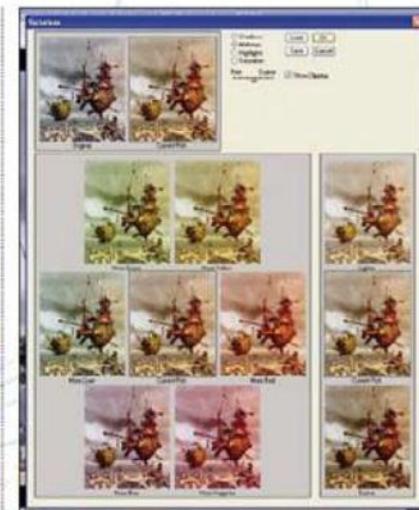
14 Finishing touches

I flatten the image, discarding any hidden layers, and am now ready to add the finishing touches. I want to make the palette more harmonious, so I duplicate the flattened layer, then open up Image Adjustments>Variations. I click through the colour variants until I find one I'm happy with. The resulting layer can look slightly monochromatic, so I adjust its opacity until I'm pleased with the colour balance, then merge the layers.

15 A touch of sparkle

To tighten up the image, I go to Filter>Sharpen>Smart Sharpen, adjusting the Amount and Radius sliders until the image is as crisp as possible without being too noisy. I'm always amazed at the extra sparkle this step brings to a painting. Finally, to add a little more punch, I go to Image>Adjustments>Curves, playing with the curve to push the contrast while being careful not to lose any detail in the shadows.

Next month in...

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX

Discover the
future of epic art
in our biggest-ever issue!

Our Rising Star returns
Discover how 2010's Rising Star winner Sam Burley creates a stunning water scene.

Create textured landscapes
Paint an image by manipulating texture, light and colour with Emmanuel Malin.

iPad art masterclass
Get more from iPad's Sketchbook Pro and turn your small ideas into grand designs!

Sixty-minute portrait
Follow Kevin Crossley as he sketches a character in under an hour using photo references.

ISSUE 69 ON SALE *5 APRIL 2011*

**Dylan Cole
interviewed!**

From Avatar to Lord of the Rings,
the celebrated art director and
matte painter explains his
passion for digital art!

Photoshop
TRY YOUR HAND AT SPEEDPAINTING

Maciej Kuciara takes you through his speedpainting repertoire, using custom brushes to create a striking dragon concept

Artist PROFILE
Maciej Kuciara
COUNTRY: Poland

Maciej is an art director and concept artist who's spent six years working in the video game and entertainment design industries, specialising in creating concept art and matte paintings for Crytek and Naughty Dog.
www.maciejkuciara.com

P ainting a dragon usually takes up many hours, if not days, of my time. I doubt I'm alone in getting lost, all too easily, in among the scales and other intricate reptilian details. Without meaning to, I'm suddenly doing a full-blown, seriously time-consuming, illustration. So what better way to teach ourselves this important concept artist's discipline than limiting ourselves time-wise and attempting a speedpainting of the glorious beast?

This is a good opportunity to explain a few techniques I use to create a speedpainting. The aim is to explore creative ideas, and get them down digitally in a relatively short amount of time, without compromising the final piece of art. I'll be talking about topics such as clever uses of custom brushes, generating lighting scenarios based on existing sky photography, and creating the illusion of detail through colour and value changes. It's a very simple idea on paper, yet the complexity of reptilian skin can easily reduce our choices when it comes to custom brushes, colours and values.

One last point on speedpainting in general: it's advisable not to set yourself too many goals, because then things can easily get out of hand and take a good few hours or more to complete. In which case you'll have just done a painting!

1 Composition and value

I usually like to start simple and get a good feeling of the concept straight away. To do so, I choose a simple brush and start putting shapes together. Sketching in greyscale means I don't have to think about complex subjects such as lighting and colours, at least not to begin with. I limit the amount of values used in the sketch to nail down interesting composition and shapes. This also helps to keep your image free of unnecessary clutter for now.

4 Add values and colour tones

Once the majority of my colours are in the scene, I begin working with more values and colour tones. I decide to use a couple of my own custom brushes to indicate the detail of the dragon's skin. To give a reptile a believable look I employ a brush that uses scattered and textured rectangles. This brush has Angle Jitter (Window>Brushes>Shape Dynamics) set to Direction, which means the angle will follow your paint strokes and create the illusion of dimensionality. I alternate using this brush with a few more textured brushes, so that when they blend on the canvas they'll create the illusion of surface detail.

2 Make colour and lighting choices

Once I feel the sketch has enough information to work with, I think about lighting and colours. Decisions made at this point have to be confident, because they'll define the final look of your artwork. I pick out a photo I took during a cloudy day and decide to base the painting on this. Outdoor scenes give you all the lighting and colour information you need. For example, you'll know whether your scene is lit with direct sun, or moonlight, or light that's diffused through the clouds. A photo of the sky also informs you what ambient colours will dominate the scene. The direction of light can hint at how materials look (dry or wet for example), and give you a value and colour range.

3 Quickly lighting up the scene

In my image our sky is heavily clouded, which introduces deep blue/cyan ambient colours that'll light the surfaces from above. The red horizon line suggests that it may be direct sunlight which lights the dragon. My values are dark blue colour tones, which will contrast with any warm and bright direct lighting used in the scene. To light my sketch quickly I layer the texture under the dragon shapes layer, after scaling and composing it properly to expose interesting cloud and horizon detail. Then I duplicate and overlay the new layer using the dragon shapes layer as a mask.

Shortcuts
Sharpen edges
Ctrl+click (PC)
Cmd+ click (Mac)
Make a selection out of a layer's contents, to sharpen edges or create a mask.

5 Error check

When adjusting details on a painting, it's also useful to zoom out from the canvas to see the whole thing, squint your eyes and check your work regularly and mirror the entire image horizontally or vertically. These methods will help you spot any composition errors, awkward detail, shape or colour imbalance.

6 Greater control

It's a great idea to paint on at least two or three layers with custom brushes. Using the Eraser tool, with the same custom brushes, gives you good control. Furthermore, linking these layers with the dragon shapes layer will give you control over your brush strokes and limit them to the shape you want to detail. It'll also help you to modify dragon shapes without losing any of the brushstrokes.

7 Illusion of detail

I try not to overwork it with unnecessary brushstrokes. Interesting detailing is added by using contrary colours and contrasting values. I give a red tint to the wings and neck fins, creating interesting contrasts of temperature. This sudden temperature change between the two adjacent surfaces creates much stronger illusion of detail than hundreds of brush strokes.
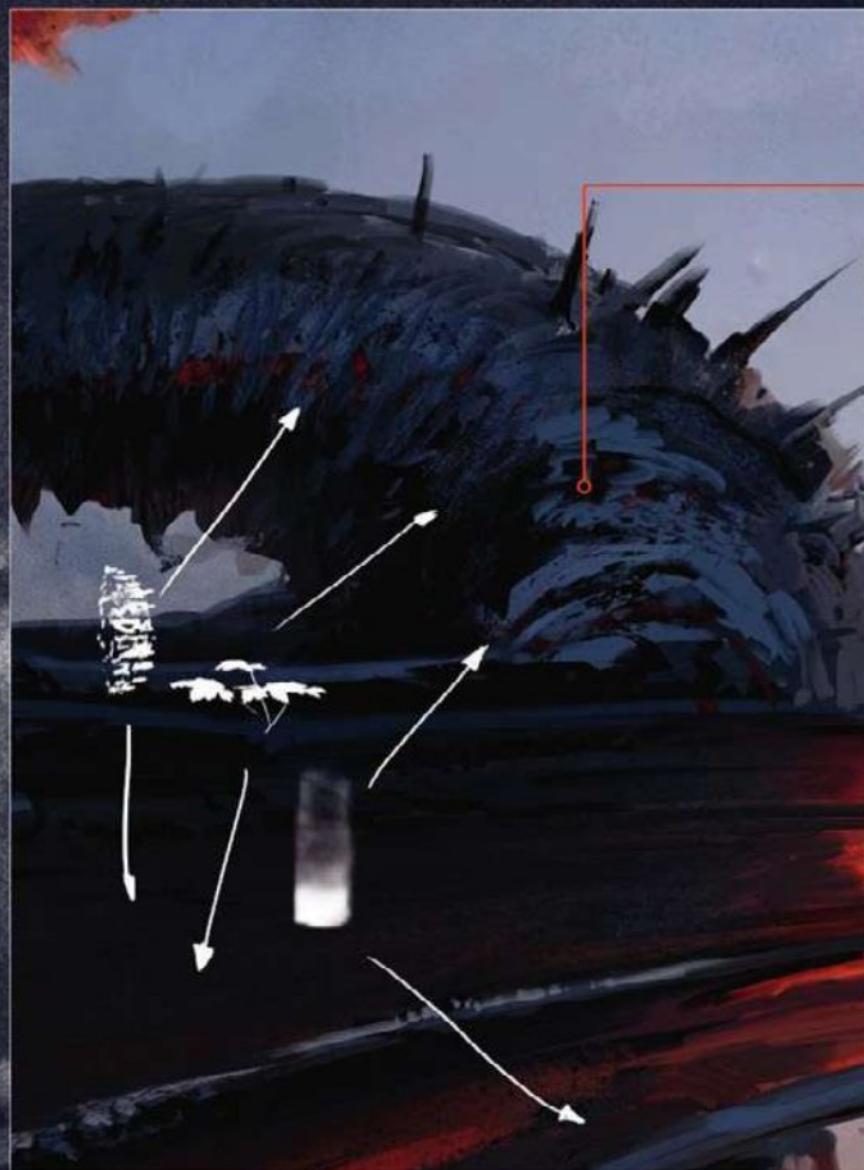
8 Mix it up

Mix the use of custom brushes with material properties, such as reflections and specularity, to add more detail. Reptile skin is specular, so adding shaped and scattered bright values adds to the illusion of detail and anchors the object in the scene, giving it a sense of 3D. Sharp highlights and cast shadows, painted with contrasting values, give more realistic dimensions to pretty simple details.

9 Touch-ups

Once satisfied with the amount of detail, I take a short break to reset my brain. This gives me a fresh view and helps me decide whether it's good enough yet. I decide to spend more time on the neck detail – it's looking a bit awkward – and amend the general colour palette, because the images need to be warmer.

10 Channel tricks

For Color Palette adjustments I often check how the image looks in different channels (Window>Channels), then play with adjustment layers such as Levels, Hue/Saturation and Color Balance. Here, I notice the image has interesting contrasts in the Blue channel. An easy way to get those values back into the canvas is to right-click and duplicate the channel I want, select the new channel and copy it over as a new layer, which I put on top of other layers with the Luminosity blending mode. After that I adjust the levels of the new layer and mask out areas I don't want it to affect, such as the red soft skin parts and eyes. I try not to go too far with touch-ups. It's easy to lose sense of time and turn the speedpainting into a full-blown illustration.

Contrast of colours

Contrast of values

THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL CG CHARACTERS

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Image by Bryan Sola

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FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX
Reviews

The latest digital art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

16 PRODUCTS ON TEST
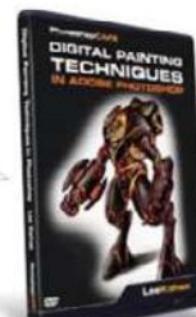
RATINGS EXPLAINED ⚏⚏⚏⚏⚏ Magnificent ⚏⚏⚏⚏ Good ⚏⚏⚏ Ordinary ⚏⚏ Poor ⚏ Atrocious

Autodesk's 3ds Max 2011 is very well suited for working on armour and robots, as is evident in Neil Roberts's Warhammer 40,000 image.

3ds Max 2011

PC ONLY

GET ANIMATED Autodesk updates 3ds Max 2011, bang on time. But has too much been shoehorned into what was already a capable product?

Price $3,495 (upgrade from 2009 or 2010 version $1,745) **Company** Autodesk **Web** www.autodesk.com **Contact** Via web
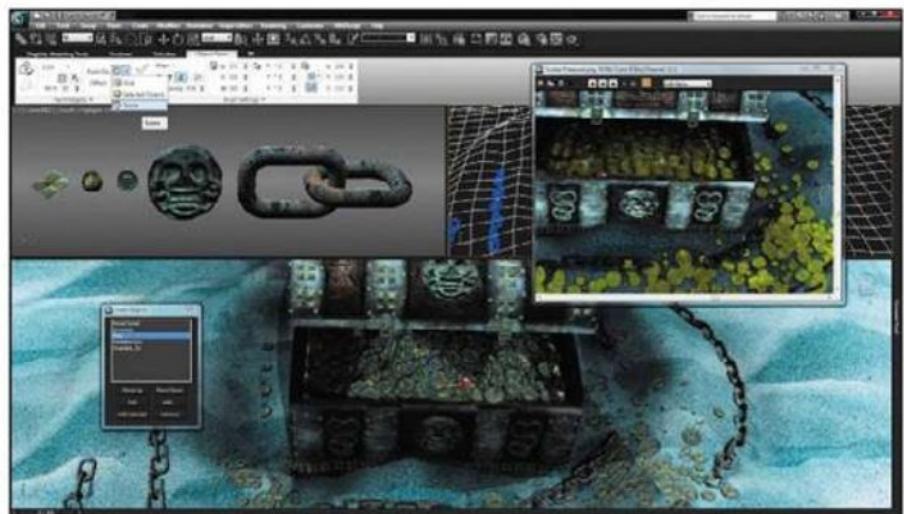
The new Quicksilver renderer is much welcome, and in testing proved super-quick.

The release of updated versions of 3ds Max from Autodesk is becoming as dependable as a Swiss clock. Each year, you can pretty much guarantee that Autodesk's raft of creative applications will undergo an update to its new tools and feature sets, much of which will set the tone for the digital art and design work that follows.

The 2011 update to 3ds Max is no different, and in many ways is one of the smartest updates Autodesk has produced in a long while. The UI hasn't changed dramatically, but it has had some of the new features shoehorned

Slate, the new node-based material editor, makes navigating and changing materials superfast.

in, which makes the interface feel a little busy at times. This doesn't slow down the workflow, but it does engender a feeling of clutter, especially when any of the editing windows are open.

The big release news is two-fold, though: a new node-based system for editing materials called Slate; and Composite. The latter is a new editor for keying, colour correction, tracking, camera mapping, raster and vector paint, spline-based warping, motion blur and depth-of-field tools. It also provides support for stereoscopic productions. It's Composite that users may find themselves most drawn to, with a scary-looking array of editable parameters. We found this daunting at

iffy means of checking boxes and parameters, and makes the process far more artistic.

The final headline feature is on the rendering front. The Quicksilver renderer is exceedingly fast on a well-specified machine, and also fast to access. This is welcome, because it means characters and landscapes can be produced without the fuss and bother of multiple saves and renders.

Elsewhere, the Viewport canvas has been spruced up and now enables users to paint directly onto models. This feature is further amplified by the Object Paint tool, which makes it possible to quickly and precisely

66 Slate puts paid to the old means of checking boxes and parameters, and makes the process more artistic 99

first, and needed to reach for the Help menu on a few occasions. But the node-based workflow suits this well, and soon enough we found the effect parameters we were looking for – and highly powerful they all are, too.

Slate is much the same in terms of scope. Again, it's a node-based system for material editing. It makes navigating and editing materials far more lucid and experimental, and the drag-and-drop approach means materials edits can be tested before being applied. Slate puts pay to the old, rather

paint objects straight onto the screen with multiple geometries.

There are many more effects, tweaks and enhancements to 3ds Max 2011 – far too many to fit in here. And this pretty much sums up the release. It's packed with small but genuinely effective enhancements, improvements and new features, topped off with a great new renderer and editors. For 3D artists, 3ds Max has always been a stand-out product. With version 2011, it's reinforced its position… until next year at least. ●

DETAILS

Features
■ Graphite toolbar
■ Revised UI
■ Composite (node-based compositor)
■ Slate (node-based material editor)
■ Viewport canvas
■ Object paint
■ Quicksilver hardware renderer
■ Containers
■ Modelling and texture enhancements
■ Character animation toolkit

System Requirements
Windows 7 Professional/Vista Business/XP Professional. Pentium 4 1.4 GHz or equivalent AMD processor with SSE2 technology, 2GB RAM, 2GB swap space, 3GB hard drive space, Direct3D 10 technology, Direct3D 9 or OpenGL-capable graphics card (fitted with 256MB or higher video card memory).

Rating

What are your favourite tools and features in 3ds Max 2011?
The Graphite Ribbon is a good introduction for newcomers, and the Material Editor looks far more intuitive and fun than previous versions – very similar to how Maya works.

What are the best features in 3ds Max 2011 for artists?
I think artists will appreciate the in-depth and user-friendly nature of the poly-modelling tools, meaning you can create complex-looking shapes with simple geometry. Also, the texturing functions are easy to grasp, so making your object look believable is simple.

What kind of artwork is 3ds Max 2011 good for?
It's very suited to hard surface objects, spacecraft, armour, robots and the like. You can gain more organic results with more complicated modelling techniques (subdivision modelling), or by using other programs, such as ZBrush, in conjunction with 3ds Max, to really get an organic sculptural feel into your models. As for art styles, 3ds Max is suited to photo-realistic imagery, although it can be use to produce amazing cartoon and abstract art.

Is it difficult for newcomers?
As with any program, using a 3D package from new is daunting. But with the right tutorials and guidance it can be simple to use. Try not to feel intimidated by what it can do. Even now, I only use a fraction of its capabilities.

Neil Roberts – aka SkinnyElbows – is a professional illustrator, sculptor, comic artist and 3D artist.
www.skinnyelbows.com

LightWave 3D 10

MAC & PC

NEXT GENERATION An affordable modelling, animation and rendering suite – with the promise of more to come

Price $895 **Company** NewTek **Web** www.newtek.com **Contact** www.newtek.com/sales_contact.php

LightWave 3D is a proven workhorse in the CG industry, with many TV and film effects studios relying on its modelling, animation and rendering tools. This latest release sees relatively few substantial changes to its main toolset; its main appeal is arguably the included free upgrade to a major revision that's set to arrive later this year.

One new feature in LightWave 3D 10 will interest anyone who enjoys tinkering with a 3D scene, aiming to get the rim light detail or shadow tone just right. LightWave's new Viewport Preview Rendering (VPR) system gives you a good idea of how your final render will look without making you stop to do test renders all the time. As you adjust a light or reposition a character's arm, VPR updates to show the outcome. Many LightWave artists already use the FPrime plug-in to do a similar job. VPR offers a more complete preview and enjoys better integration with LightWave's other tools.

Integration with other major 3D tools is also improved, with LightWave 10 transferring animation between the likes of 3ds Max and Maya with greater accuracy. This release also exports to ZBrush more effectively, which will please modellers.

Other changes includes a proper linear workflow system, which basically ensures that colours remain accurate and consistent throughout your entire production process, and a more polished user interface, which is nicer to look even if the underlying structure remains similar.

While LightWave 3D 10's price tag – comparable with Cinema 4D or modo – and advanced rendering makes it an attractive proposition, you're taking a leap in the dark with the promised major revision. Known as CORE, it promises much but is yet to be tested. However, the fact that LightWave 10 with CORE will cost nearly twice as much as LightWave 10 certainly acts as an incentive to take a chance and buy now for the lower price.

DETAILS

Features
- Modelling toolset
- Timeline-based animation
- Rendering engine
- Viewport Preview Rendering
- Improved import and export
- Linear workflow
- Revised user interface
- Free upgrade to CORE

System Requirements
PC: Intel Core 2 or Athlon II processor, Windows Vista or 7, 2GB RAM
Mac: Intel processor, OS X 10.6, 2GB RAM

Rating

© image by Neil Maccormack (www.bearfootfilms.com)
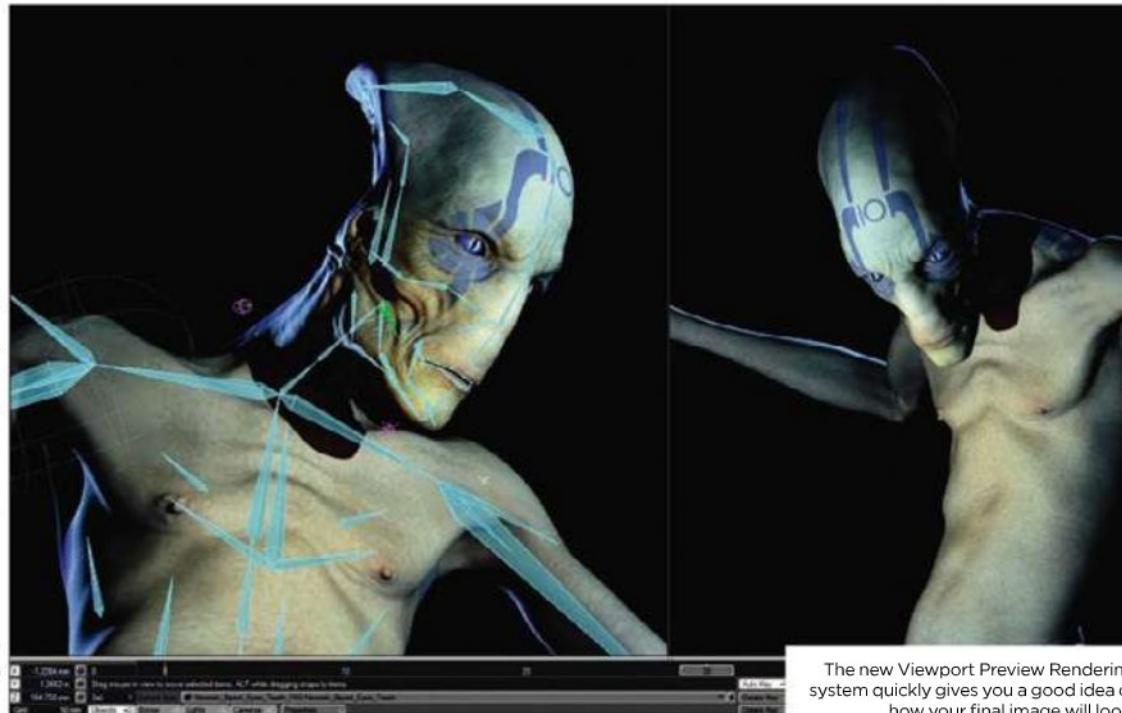
The new Viewport Preview Rendering system quickly gives you a good idea of how your final image will look.

Use XgoldenSection to find the golden ratio in your artwork – it's an easy way to add class and structure to your compositions.

XgoldenSection

PC ONLY

SECRET WEAPON
Bring out the beauty in your compositions

Price £7.50
Company Del Sol Software
Web www.xgoldensection.com

RATING

The golden ratio – or 1:1.6180339887 to its nerd mates – is where art meets mathematics, a short-cut to achieving natural, pleasing proportions within your composition or concept designs. You can draw guidelines on your canvas to work out golden sections if you know the rules, but XgoldenSection offers a much easier way of using this enduring art trick.

This neat little tool hovers over your art program of choice (or any other application). All you have to do is line up the end markers against an object or frame, as if you were measuring it. The middle marker then shows how the length that you've defined should be divided up in accordance with the golden ratio. It's really that simple.

A few menu options enable you to flip the marker to measure the ratio point from the other end or lock the markers along either the X- or Y-axis; keyboard shortcuts would make these easier to toggle on and off. You can also turn on guides to make lining up easier.

While XgoldenSection feels a little unpolished for an app that's reached its third major release, it's undeniably simple to use, and can help you bring out the beauty of your designs almost effortlessly.

Sentury II

**VISUAL FUTURISM** This eye-catching book brings together Syd Mead's favourite pieces of the past decade

Author Syd Mead **Publisher** Design Studio Press **Price** £40
Web www.titanbooks.com **ISBN** 9780857681140 **Available** Now

At 77 years old, Syd Mead may still be best known for having worked on the films Blade Runner and TRON, but such is the artist's clockwork consistency that a glance at his life's work will reveal heaps of equally inspiring art.

Perhaps it was while cutting his teeth as a car designer for Ford in the 1950s that he acquired his momentous work ethic. What's for sure is that from those early days of reinventing the 59' Caddy, to his more recent work designing the mask maker in Mission Impossible 3, the artwork has come thick and fast and remained steadily great.

A loosely affiliated companion piece to 2001's Sentury, the second instalment covers the years 2001 to 2010, creating a visual order to the art. Although they're not the only art books that he's released, Syd's clearly put a lot of time and planning into this series, with each page filled with insights on each project. At 12x12 inches, he gets away with this word-heavy approach without cramping the images. Although the prose is a little expansive in places, when he's talking us through his new vehicle designs, or detailing his technique, it's a fascinating read.
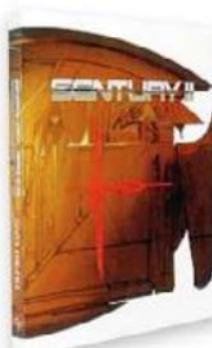
There are also several nice personal touches in the book. It opens with a personal biography of the past decade, and the dedications to the people that have supported and inspired the man through his career are charming. Essentially, the art is fantastic and both immediately recognisable as Syd's yet buzzing with totally new and fresh concepts and designs.

Whether it's a restaurant design, poster illustration or the ever-popular film concept art, (here including The Core, The Sound of Thunder and MI 3), each image rewards several closer looks, proving that there's plenty more life in this 'visual futurist' yet.

RATING

Further reading…
Where DreamWorks stops these artists start, and plenty of painting insights

Moonshine: DreamWorks Artists… After Dark!

Edited Christophe Lautrette
Publisher Design Studio Press **Price** £15
Web www.designstudiopress.com
ISBN 9780857681133 **Available** Now
RATING

"Even if you sing in a choir, you never stop singing in the shower," says DreamWorks project director Chris Sanders, and that's an apposite description of this book, a collection of personal artworks from DreamWorks artists.

This book collects the personal, unique paintings that get produced when there's no deadline or overall vision. Each of the 47 artists featured are different, and the book becomes a gumbo of deft artistic skill and striking, often irreverent imagination. Lots of the art is polished as well, making this a personal yet professional release.

Digital Painting Techniques: Volume 2

Edited Simon Morse
Publisher 3D Total **Price** £30
Web: www.3dtotal.com
ISBN 9780955153013 **Available** Now
RATING

If you want a good few months' worth of primarily 2D painting tutorials to make your way through, exploring various styles and genres, this book will serve you well. Inside you'll find some brilliant artists that take you through breakdowns of their own images, whether it's caricature, sci-fi battles, fantasy character, or dabbling with custom brushes.

Aside from a gallery section that includes some familiar finished images, the content and artists' insights are all new, making this a solid second step in a promising book series.

Lee introduces useful techniques, such as correctly setting up the line art through channels.

SAMPLE ON YOUR DVD!
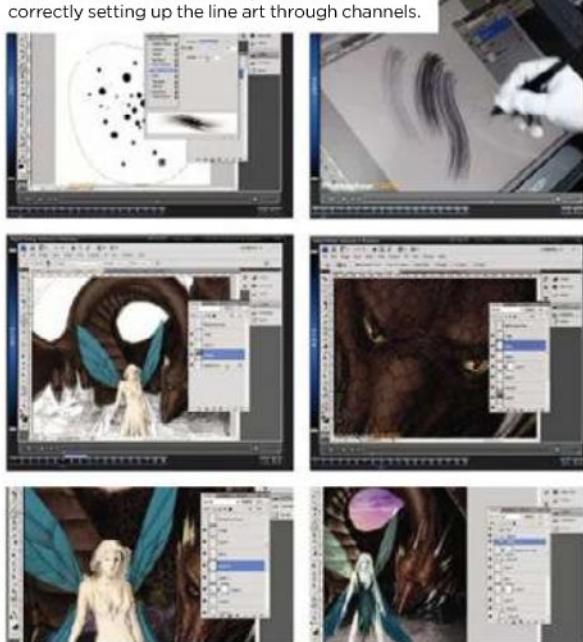
As Lee points out himself, it's always either a big fairy or a tiny dragon.

Digital Painting Techniques
in Adobe Photoshop

NO NONSENSE Digital artist Lee Kohse gets straight to the point with three hours of Photoshop digital art fundamentals
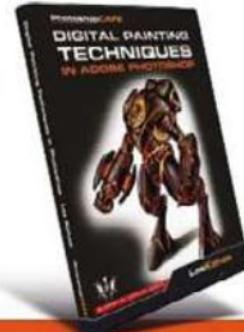
Publisher PhotoshopCAFE **Price** $50 **Format** DVD/Download **Web** www.photoshopcafe.com

Founded a decade ago by former creative director Colin Smith, PhotoshopCAFE is best-known for its extensive training library for photographers and designers. However, the company also offers a smattering of painting and illustration tutorials, with a punchy presentation style that sets it apart from the familiar brands in art training. Lee Kohse's tutorial is no exception.

The video is divided into 19 digestible segments, wrapped in a user interface that enables you to preview segments and jump to any you prefer the look of. Alternatively, click Play All, select the first chapter, then sit back and watch.

There are three broad sections that together make up a dinner menu of art techniques. For your starter, Lee focuses on creating brushes and other general techniques. Footage of the artist using his tablet even shows you how to move your hand and wrist to

apply smooth, consistent strokes. There's little that an experienced digital artist won't have already picked up, but newcomers will greatly appreciate the level of detail.

The main course is familiar fantasy art territory: a fairy and a dragon. Working over a scan of his pencils, Lee introduces techniques such as correctly setting up the line art through channels, before painting a variety of materials and textures with the brushes he created. As a refreshing dessert, Lee works up a sci-fi robot design: a chance to cover a contrasting set of textures, such as metal and glows.

This is a distinct proposition from many other training videos, with the emphasis more on practical Photoshop skills than the broader principles of imagery. If you've struggled with the fundamentals of correctly preparing your artwork and creating a range of textures with digital tools, you'll find this an effective primer that'll bring you up to speed in an afternoon.

DETAILS

Topics covered
- Creating custom brushes for drawing, painting and effects
- Graphics tablet technique
- Channels and alphas
- Painting skin, hair, fabric and other key textures
- Fixing errors
- Detail and clean-up

Length
210 minutes

Rating
⭐⭐⭐⭐

ARTIST PROFILE
LEE KOHSE

Lee Kohse has earned more than 30 awards for art direction and design. His client list includes Nike, Verizon, Microsoft, Lucasfilm, Topps, Inkworks, DC Comics, IDW Comics and 20th Century Fox, and he has produced art for Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Aliens vs Predator, Angel and more. Lee is the creative director of BloodFire Studios, where he works with some of the best artists in the film and comic industries to create comics and original content, as well as his own strip, Kindergoth.

www.leekohse.com

Zack Snyder is a director who's used to handling effects-heavy films.

Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole

IT'S A HOOT The Sucker Punch director continues his love affair with digital FX with this beautiful owl odyssey

Distributor Warner Home Video **Certificate** PG **Price** £20 **Available** 11 April

While most movies of this ilk pick from the bones of Pixar and try to deliver cute sentimental slapstick, director Zack Snyder (Sucker Punch, Watchmen) has taken a different, more adult approach.

Based on the first three books in Kathryn Lasky's best-selling series, Guardians of Ga'Hoole, there's an unavoidable literary feel to the adventure. Soren is a young owl obsessed with the mythical Owls of Ga'Hoole who saved the owl kingdom from the evil Pure Ones. When Soren and his brother Kludd are taken to St Aggies, a school for orphaned owls, they uncover a plot to turn the pupils into an army. The Pure Ones are real, so Soren must escape and find the Owls of Ga'Hoole using clues from stories told to him as a child.

Although the plot is unremarkable – only stretching into uncharted, darker territory to question the cost of heroism – the visuals soar. Created by Australian company Animal Logic, Legend of the Guardians looks spectacular. Every scene is a blaze of colour and movement, feathers flutter and armoured owls sparkle. The character designs all carry individual quirks, while the production design marries the best elements of Tolkien with Lasky's own animalistic fantasy.
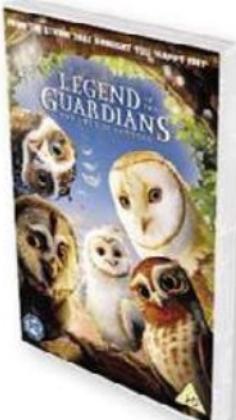
This is one of the more ambitious animated movies of the year, but while the Blu-ray 3D looks stunning, the extras fail to deliver: a Road Runner cartoon and a children's documentary on owls is your lot, folks.

Simplifying Lasky's novels into one adventure has knocked much of the originality from her books, but at least younger fans can now follow the action, while older viewers can admire the beautiful visuals.

RATING ⛺⛺⛺⛺

Other new releases…

The remake train rumbles on, and a super-villain steals kids' hearts

Let Me In

Distributor Icon Home Entertainment
Certificate 15
Price £16
Available 14 March
RATING ⛺⛺⛺

Let Me In is a showpiece for two of the best young actors working in Hollywood today, but it remains too indebted to its Swedish predecessor to really raise the pulse.

Featuring Kodi Smit-McPhee (The Road) and Chloe Moretz (Kick Ass), it's an adaptation of John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel Let the Right One In, which was made into a film in 2008. Cloverfield director Matt Reeves teases out the story of a harassed boy making friends with a 12-ish-year old vampire, setting a brooding, thoughtful pace uncommon in most US horrors (and straight out of the 2008 film).

What's totally 'US', though, is the CG-heavy vampire moments: Abby moves impossibly fast, with exaggerated yellow-lens eyes when she gets a whiff of blood. Thrust into the otherwise mimetic filmmaking, these moments wrench the spotlight away from the class actors and we're left with a questionable remake.

Despicable Me

Distributor Universal
Certificate U
Price £20
Available Now
RATING ⛺⛺⛺

Kids' 3D animated films have attracted so much critical acclaim over the years that it's easy to forget they're primarily aimed at children and not necessarily those "of all ages", as the publicity arm of some film studios would have you believe.

Despicable Me is beautifully made, highly energetic and great fun, brought to us from the people that had a hand in the Ice Age franchise. The irreverent story of a super-villain trying to recapture his criminal mojo with the help of three orphans is gloriously absurd. And it has fun confounding our expectations of its stock characters: non-specific foreign-accented criminals and wide-eyed orphans. If this sounds a little predictable to the adults, it is. But the kids should find it funny and affecting, and that's what counts. ●

A temporarily reunited Takaki and Akari stand under a cherry tree, in one of the film's most powerfully emotive scenes.

5 Centimetres Per Second

SLOW BURN The simplest drama delivers the heaviest punch as Makoto Shinkai's star continues to rise

Distributor Manga **Certificate** U **Price** £18 **Available** 14 March

Director Makoto Shinkai is regarded as a rising star of the anime world, a talented young director who belongs alongside Hayao Miyazaki, Mamoru Oshii and the late Satoshi Kon. 5 Centimetres Per Second, a collection of three linked short pieces, is his third feature film. It doesn't so much tug at your heartstrings as attach them to an industrial winch, hit the On switch and tell you it'll be back after lunch.

We follow Takaki Tono, a boy who moves house frequently due to his father's job, as his life unfolds from elementary school through to adulthood. As a child, he finds a kindred spirit in Akari, a girl who joins his school the year after his own arrival in Tokyo; but they're parted when Akari is forced to move to the countryside. The pair stay in touch through letters, but are finally driven even further apart when Takaki moves to Kagoshima, in the far south-west of Japan.

The overall story is simple, but it's handled with a lightness of touch that maximises its impact without ever making it feel melodramatic. The first arc sees Takaki enduring train delays as he tries to see Akari for the last time before his move, and it's so tense we may as well be trapped on that train along with him. The story unfolds against breathtaking scenery and lavish animation, from the simple beauty of falling snowflakes and cherry blossoms, to the subtly detailed representation of a launching space shuttle cutting across the sky. It's a masterpiece of understated but effective filmmaking, and clear evidence that Shinkai deserves every accolade. Be warned: the final scene packs one hell of an emotional sucker punch.

RATING 🐇🐇🐇🐇🐇
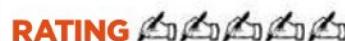
Also look at…
Familiar but fun kick flick and why cute dolls can be dark and terrifying

Bamboo Blade Complete Series One

Distributor Manga
Certificate PG
Price £40
Available Now
RATING 🐇🐇🐇🐇
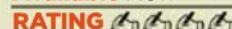
This teen comedy about a high-school kendo club can never really be described as anything more than frothy, but it's good fun at least. It's formulaic and familiar: a kendo instructor is challenged by a former classmate to pit their respective girls' kendo teams against each other. Cue important life lessons learnt about teamwork, integrity and the value of both winning and losing along the way. The TV budget means we get some stock animation and strange artistic choices along the way. For example, star fighter Tama is meant to be short, but often only comes up to her opponents' hips. However, the characters are all likeable enough and the whole series is sufficiently charming, so any quibbles are easily forgiven.

Rozen Maiden & Traumend Collection

Distributor MVM
**Certificate** 12
Price £30
Available Now
RATING 🐇🐇🐇🐇🐇

Assuming you don't find hyper-realistic dolls absolutely terrifying (in which case there's enough here to give you nightmares for weeks), Rozen Maiden is a surprising series. Despite the cutesy appearance of its protagonists – living dolls dressed in elegant Lolita-style clothes – it's got a seriously dark edge. The dolls try to destroy each other, so that one of them can be crowned 'Alice', the apparent epitome of purity and beauty. We also watch the main human character, Jun, as he fights with inner demons. The stylishly presented nightmare worlds where the dolls do battle are striking, and the tragedies that befall the characters later in the show contrast beautifully with the earlier light-hearted tone. ●
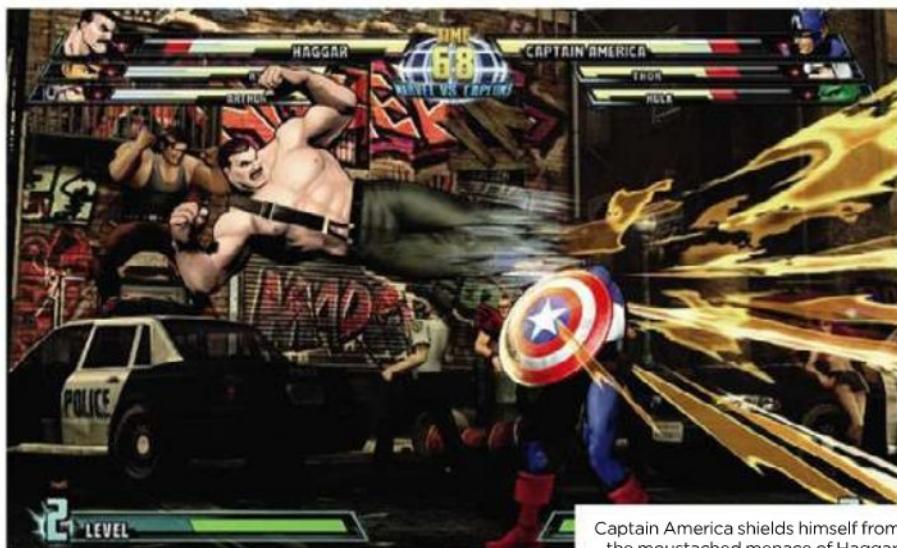
Captain America shields himself from the moustached menace of Haggar.

Marvel Vs Capcom 3 Fate Of Two Worlds

HELP FOR HEROES The mash-up classic returns with a multi-universe battle between good and evil

Format Xbox 360, PS3 **Publisher** Capcom
Price £50 **Available** Now **Web** www.marvelvscapcom3.com

After a decade of cult status the ultimate mash-up of classic Capcom and Marvel characters is back, pitting the likes of Iron Man, Doctor Doom and Spider-Man against Wesker, Ryu and Dante. In this new story, Resident Evil's Wesker and Doctor Doom team up to merge their universes. The heroes of both worlds join together to stop them – cue lots of fighting.

While past games have leaned towards hardcore and professional fighting game fans, Marvel vs Capcom 3 has been streamlined for a wider market. The four-button combo system has been reduced to three, while a single button now controls tag gameplay; swapping between characters ignites new super combos. With that said, online will still be for genre purists, while a new License Card system displays your opponent's defensive and offensive traits, enabling you to tailor your tactics accordingly.

However, the game's not without its flaws. Characters can feel sluggish and some are overpowered. Arthur, from Ghosts 'n Goblins, has a nigh-on limitless supply of ranged projectile attacks that ensure most characters can't get near him.

These are minor niggles, though. Overall, Marvel vs Capcom 3 is a beautifully designed package, and every character meets the demanding needs of fans; Wolverine even wears the John Cassaday-designed costume from Astonishing X-Men. The game is an accessible, fun celebration of two loved universes. This is the most fun you'll have this year in rendered tights.

RATING

Also look at…

A spectacular snow-bound shooter and laughs as you slaughter with style

Killzone 3

Format PS3
Publisher Sony
Price £52
Available Now
RATING

Sony's blistering first-person shooter returns after a two-year hiatus, and the results are nothing short of spectacular. Developer Guerrilla has pushed the PS3 hardware to its limits, crafting a first-person shooter that's arguably one of the finest of its kind.

Art director Jan-Bart van Beek has meshed the cold industrial look of Killzone 2 with vast Arctic landscapes, eye-popping thunderstorms and environments five times the size of its predecessor. Combine these vistas with the 3D tech powering the game and you've got a shooter experience unlike any other. While gameplay is slower than some console shooters, and can feel a little staged, the atmosphere and art design is unmatched.

Killzone collectors should consider investing in the Helghast Edition, which comes with a 100-page hardback art book, featuring the stunning concept art behind the game's evocative universe.

Bulletstorm

Format: PC, Xbox 360, PS3
Publisher: EA
Price: From £35
Available: Now
RATING

A million miles away from Sony's Killzone 3, People Can Fly's Bulletstorm casts aside the standard 'war is hell' mantra, turning the game into a goofy, action-packed shooter that guns for big belly laughs.

Built using Epic's Unreal Engine 3 and showcasing that distinct Epic art flavour that's synonymous with Gears of War and Unreal Tournament, Bulletstorm's unique selling point is its Skill Shot System. The goal is to combine weapons, attacks and any environmental objects you can get your hands on to slaughter with style.

Bloody and consistently hilarious to boot, Bulletstorm has its tongue firmly rooted in its gore-drenched cheek. With its Tony Moore-inspired art style (just take a look at the box) and a script penned by Fear Agent and Dead Space scribe Rick Remender, Bulletstorm is both bizarre and a breath of fresh air in a massively crowded market. ●

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Framestore

MOVIE MAGIC Once dedicated solely to digital VFX, the UK's Framestore has a new art department that's already well known in Hollywood...

This character illustration is by Jon McCoy, for his personal portfolio.
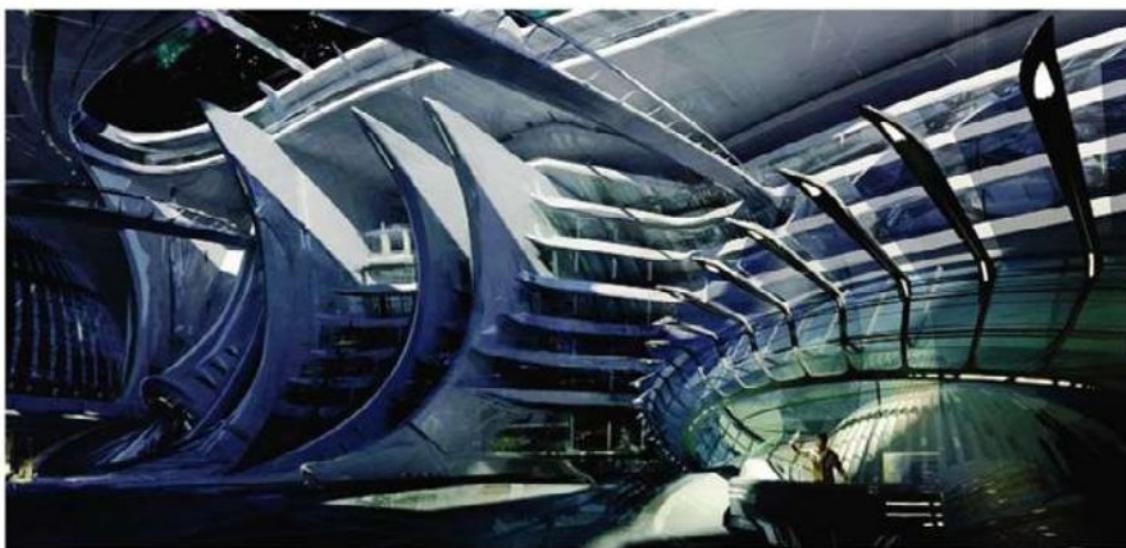
Starting a business based on faith in mathematical theory and a passion for digital effects sounds unusual, but that's the background to Framestore, one of the UK's most successful VFX studios.

In 1986 William Sargent and his partners Alison Turner, Sharon Reed, Jonathan Hills and Mike McGee wanted to use computers to create visual effects and graphics for TV, music videos and commercials. "We talked about it over dinner one night in Clapham," says William, "and started 17 weeks later." Adopting Moore's Law,

This environment image by Jason Horley was for The Tale of Despereaux.

which states that computer processing capacity doubles approximately every 18 months, William predicted great things for his burgeoning studio. Theory and passion did the trick and now Framestore is one of the few VFX studios outside the US to be on speed dial for Hollywood's biggest producers and directors.

Kevin Jenkins, the director of Framestore's new art department, stumbles when we quiz him about the films he's worked on: "There are just too many to remember!" The list includes The Golden Compass (BAFTA and Oscar nominated) and The Dark Knight (again, BAFTA nominated). Framestore was the only UK studio asked to create effects shots for Avatar. When we ask what William's favourite Framestore effect sequence is, the answer is surprising, given the effects-heavy films the company's worked on: "Hugh Grant's seasonal walk in Notting Hill."

Futuristic atrium, by Kevin Jenkins, is for an unspecified pitch.

Things really changed in 2008 when Framestore was asked to create an entire sequence for Prince of Persia. The project required more concept work than usual and after 20 years specialising in digital effects for film, Framestore created its own internal art department. "We've always created concept art just to help the development process," says Kevin, "but Persia was exceptional." He alone handed in over 200 paintings for the effects sequence.

Before arriving at Framestore, Kevin worked as a commercial illustrator and matte painter. "We were doing virtually a matte painting of what the final shot might be," he says. "It proved so successful that it snowballed until

JON McCOY

Framestore's newest artist made the jump from video games

Why did you leave video games for film?

I worked in studios (Free Radical and Crytek) for three years and freelanced for two years while at university. But I felt that my artwork would look far more spectacular in film than games. In games you can stylise reality; in film it has to look real.

What do you like about working at Framestore?

It has a long list of great films behind it, and for me the important thing has got to be the project that you're working on.

What's the challenge of working at Framestore?

It's great fun, but you have to be open to feedback, and the constant amendments and changes to your work. Everyone here is very open and gives their opinions.

Do you have any advice for those who want to work in film?

Getting a job working in the pre-production art department on a film is incredibly difficult. The job opportunities are so rare that you've got to have a good portfolio. There was one image in my portfolio that impressed at interview and if I hadn't have done it I wouldn't have got the job. It can come down to one image.

How was your first day?

They threw me in at the deep end! On my very first day I started doing the concepts, and then the production designer on this major new movie walked in and I had to present my work to him. In this job you have to hit the ground running – it's sink or swim.

Headhunted by Crytek from university, Jon joined the Framestore team in 2010 as a full-time concept artist.

www.jonmccoyart.com

Jason Horley's horrific look for Harvey Dent was produced for Batman sequel The Dark Knight.

"We pluck people who'll hit the ground running, but we want new ideas and talent"

This fearsome-looking dinosaur design was created by Daren Horley for Primeval.

painting. "It's all about the ideas," he says. "A cool painting is fine there are tonnes of people out there who can create cool artwork – the difficulty is getting the director's vision."

It's common in studios to pin up paintings you like, but at Framestore they hang paintings they don't like. "It's a huge process of elimination." It's one that's paying off too. The company recently won nominations at the VES Awards, Oscars and BAFTAs for the latest Harry Potter. There's more in the pipeline, including more Potter, a Steven Spielberg flick and fantasy comedy Your Highness.

"I'm twice as busy as I ever was," says Kevin. With this in mind, he says Framestore is always looking to hire more hands. "We pluck people who can hit the ground running, but we want new ideas and new talent," says Kevin. "Even though there's more opportunity now, I feel it's harder to get your head above the parapet, so we're always on the forums and looking in ImagineFX to see who we can use."

everyone in the facility wanted it. It seemed mad not to create an art department to deliver that resource."

The new department means Kevin's team of six full-time artists can spend as much, if not more, time researching and thinking about a project than

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Marcos deBarros

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like a pro. This render shows my
interpretation of Ichigo, a
character from the anime
series, "Bleach."

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